LOVAT DICKSON'S MAGAZINE

A MAGAZINE FOR THOUGHTFUL PEOPLE

VOLUME 4 JUNE 1935 NUMBER 6

Frank O'Connor	IN THE TRAIN	585
William Saroyan	LAURA, IMMORTAL	604
David Hamilton	"TOOMERS"	610
Violet M. MacDonald	THE SNOWSTORM	621
R. N. Currey	BLACK DOG	646
F. M. Dunn	BLESSED VIRGIN	656
J. E. Sewell	VOYAGE TO CHINA	675
Allan Seager	FUGUE FOR HARMONICA	685
Pearl S. Buck	MR. BINNEY'S AFTERNOON	692
Rhys Davies	THE PUBLIC-HOUSE	701

Edited by L. A. G. STRONG *Published Monthly*

The Editor will be glad to consider MSS. offered for publication and will endeavour to return unsuitable MSS. when they are accompanied by a stamped envelope. Neither the acceptance of and payment for a contribution, nor the sending of a proof, can be regarded as a guarantee of publication.

Editorial, Advertising and General Business Offices: 38 Bedford Street, Strand, London, W.C.2. Annual subscription, inland, twelve shillings, post paid: abroad, fourteen shillings, post paid.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/lovat-dicksons-magazine_1935-06_4_6

In The Train

Frank O'Connor

I

"THERE!" said the sergeant's wife. "You would hurry me."

"I like to be in time for a train," replied the sergeant with the equability of one who has many times before explained the guiding principle of his existence.

"I'd have had heaps of time to buy the hat," added his wife.

The sergeant sighed and opened his evening paper. His wife looked out on the dark platform, pitted with pale lights under which faces and faces passed, lit up and dimmed again. A uniformed lad strode up and down with a tray of periodicals and chocolates. Further up the platform a drunken man was being seen off by his friends.

"I'm very fond of Michael O'Leary," he shouted. "He is the most sincere man I know."

"I have no life," sighed the sergeant's wife. "No life at all! There isn't a soul to speak to, nothing to look at all day but bogs and mountains and rain—always rain! And the people! Well, we've had a fair sample of them, haven't we?"

The sergeant continued to read.

"Just for the few days it's been like heaven. Such interesting people! Oh, I thought Mr. Boyle had a glorious face! And his voice—it went through me."

The sergeant lowered his paper, took off his peaked cap and laid it on the seat beside him, and lit his pipe. He lit it in the old-fashioned way, ceremoniously, his eyes blinking pleasurably like a sleepy cat's in the match-flame. His wife scrutinized each face that passed, and it was plain that for her life meant faces and people and things, and nothing more.

"Oh, dear!" she said again. "I simply have no existence. I was educated in a convent and play the piano; my father was a literary man, and yet I am compelled to associate with the lowest types of humanity. If it was even a decent town, but a village!"

"Ah," said the sergeant, gapping his reply with anxious puffs, "maybe with God's help we'll get a shift one of these days." But he said it without conviction, and it was also plain that he was well pleased with himself, with the prospect of returning home, with his pipe and with his paper.

"Here are Magner and the others," said his wife as four other policemen passed the barrier. "I hope they'll have sense enough to let us alone. . . . How do you do? How do you do? Had a nice time, boys?" she called with sudden animation, and her pale, sullen face became warm and vivacious.

The policemen smiled and touched their caps but did not halt.

"They might have stopped to say good evening," she added sharply, and her face sank into its old expression of boredom and dissatisfaction. "I don't think I'll ask Delancey to tea again. The others make an attempt, but really, Delancey is hopeless. When I smile and say 'Guard Delancey, wouldn't you like to use the butter-knife?' he just scowls at me from under his shaggy brows and says without a moment's hesitation, 'I would not.'"

"Ah, Delancey is a poor slob," said the sergeant affectionately.

"Oh, yes, but that's not enough, Jonathan. Slob or no slob, he should make an attempt. He's a young man; he should have a dinner-jacket at least. What sort of wife will he get if he won't even wear a dinner-jacket?"

"He's easy, I'd say. He's after a farm in Waterford."

"Oh, a farm! A farm! The wife is only an incidental, I suppose?"

"Well, now from all I hear she's a damn nice little incidental."

"Yes, I suppose many a nice little incidental came from a farm," answered his wife, raising her pale brows. But the irony was lost on him.

"Indeed, yes, indeed, yes," he said fervently.

"And here," she added in biting tones, "come our charming neighbours."

Into the pale lamplight stepped a group of peasants. Not such as one sees in the environs of a capital, but in the mountains and along the coasts. Gnarled, wild, with turbulent faces, their ill-cut clothes full of character, the women in pale brown shawls, the men wearing black sombreros and carrying big sticks, they swept in, ill-at-ease, laughing and shouting defiantly. And, so much part of their natural environment were they, that for a moment they seemed to create about themselves rocks and bushes, tarns, turf ricks and sea.

With a prim smile the sergeant's wife bowed to them through the open window.

"How do you do? How do you do?" she called. "Had a nice time?"

At the same moment the train gave a jolt and there was a rush in which the excited peasants were carried away. Some minutes passed; the influx of passengers almost ceased, and a porter began to slam the doors. The drunken man's voice rose in a cry of exultation.

"You can't possibly beat O'Leary!" he declared. "I'd lay down my life for Michael O'Leary."

Then, just as the train was about to start, a young woman in a brown shawl rushed through the barrier. The shawl which came low enough to hide her eyes she held firmly across her mouth, leaving visible only a long, thin nose with a hint of pale flesh at either side. Beneath the shawl she was carrying a large parcel.

She looked hastily around, a porter shouted to her and pushed her towards the nearest compartment which happened to be that occupied by the sergeant and his wife. He had actually seized the handle of the door when the sergeant's wife sat up and screamed.

"Quick! Quick!" she cried. "Look who it is! She's coming in! Jonathan! Jonathan!"

The sergeant rose with a look of alarm on his broad red face. The porter threw open the door, with his free hand grasping the woman's elbow. But when she laid eyes on the sergeant's startled countenance she stepped back, tore herself free, and ran crazily up the platform. The engine shrieked, the porter slammed the door with a curse, somewhere another door opened and shut, and the row of watchers, frozen into effigies of farewell, now dark now bright, began to glide gently past the window, and the stale, smoky air was charged with the breath of open fields.

II

The four policemen spread themselves out in a separate compartment and lit cigarettes.

"Ah, poor old Delancey!" said Magner with his reckless laugh. "He's cracked on her all right."

"Cracked on her," agreed Fox. "Did ye see the eye he gave her?"

Delancey smiled sheepishly. He was a tall, handsome, black-haired young man with the thick eyebrows described by the sergeant's wife. He was new to the force and suffered from a mixture of natural gentleness and country awkwardness.

"I am," he said, "cracked on her. The devil admire me, I never hated anyone yet, but I think I hate the living sight of her."

"Oh, now! Oh, now!" protested Magner.

"I do. I think the Almighty God must have put that one in the world with the one main object of persecuting me."

"Well, indeed," said Foley, "I don't know how the sergeant puts up with the same damsel. If any woman up and called me by an outlandish name like Jonathan when all knew my name was plain John, I'd do fourteen days for her—by God, I would, and a calendar month!"

The four men were launched on a favourite topic that held them for more than an hour. None of them liked the sergeant's wife, and all had stories to tell against her. From these there emerged the fact that she was an incurable scandal-monger and mischief-maker, who couldn't keep quiet about her own business, much less that of her neighbours. And while they talked the train dragged across a dark plain, the heart of Ireland, and in the moonless night tiny cottage windows blew past like sparks from a fire, and a pale simulacrum of the lighted carriages leaped and frolicked over hedges and fields. Magner shut the window, and the compartment began to fill with smoke.

"She'll never rest till she's out of Farranchreesht," he said.

"That she mightn't!" groaned Delancey.

"How would you like the city yourself, Dan?" asked Magner.

"Man, dear," exclaimed Delancey with sudden brightness, "I'd like it fine. There's great life in a city."

"You can have it and welcome," said Foley, folding his hands across his paunch.

"Why so?"

"I'm well content where I am."

"But the life!"

"Ah, life be damned! What sort of life is it when you're always under someone's eye? Look at the poor devils in court, standing there for hours not able to blow their noses!"

"True enough, true enough," said Fox.

"Ah, yes, yes," said Delancey, "but the adventures they have!"

"What adventures?"

"Look now, there was a sergeant in court only yesterday telling me about a miser, an old maid without a soul in the world, that died in an ould loft on the quays. Well, this sergeant I'm talking about put a new man on duty outside the door while he went back to report, and all this fellow had to do was to kick the door and frighten off the rats."

"That's enough, that's enough!" cried Foley.

"Yes, yes, but listen now, listen, can't you? He was there about ten minutes with a bit of candle in his hand, and all at once the door at the foot of the stairs begins to open. 'Who's there?' says he, giving a start. 'Who's there, I say?' There was no answer and still the door kept opening quietly. Then he gave a laugh. What was it but a cat! 'Puss, puss,' says he, 'come on up, puss!' Thinking, you know, the ould cat would be company. Up comes the cat, pitter-patter on the stairs, and then, whatever look this fellow gave the door, the hair stood up on his head. What was coming in but another cat! 'Coosh!' says he, stamping his foot and kicking the door to frighten them. 'Coosh away to hell out of that!' And then another cat came in, and then another, and in his fright he dropped the candle and kicked out right and left.

The cats began to hiss and bawl and that robbed him of the last stitch of sense. He bolted down the stairs, and as he did he trod on one of the brutes, and before he knew where he was, he slipped and fell head over heels, and when he put out his hand to grip something, 'twas a cat he gripped, and he felt the claws tearing his hands and face. He had strength enough to pull himself up and run, but when he reached the barrack gate down he dropped in a fit. He was a raving lunatic for three weeks after."

"And that," said Foley with bitter restraint, "is what you call adventure!"

"Dear knows," added Magner, drawing himself up with a shiver, "'tis a great consolation to be able to put on your cap and go out for a drink any hour of the night you like."

"'Tis, of course," drawled Foley scornfully. "And to know the worst case you'll have in ten years is a bit of a scrap about politics."

"I dunno," sighed Delancey dreamily. "I'm telling you there's great charm about the Criminal Courts."

"Damn the much charm they had for you when you were in the box then," growled Foley.

"I know, sure, I know," admitted Delancey crestfallen.

"Shutting his eyes," said Magner with a laugh, "like a kid afraid he was going to get a box across the ears."

"And still," said Delancey, "this sergeant fellow I'm talking about, he said, after a while you wouldn't mind it no more than if 'twas a card party, but talk slap up to the judge himself."

"I suppose you would," agreed Magner pensively.

There was silence in the smoky compartment that jolted and rocked on its way across Ireland, and the four occupants, each touched with that morning wit which afflicts no one so much as state witnesses, thought of how they would speak to

the judge if only they had him before them now. They looked up to see a fat red face behind the door, and a moment later it was dragged back.

"Is thish my carriage, gentlemen?" asked a meek and boozy voice.

"No, 'tisn't. Go on with you!" snapped Magner.

"I had as nice a carriage as ever was put on a railway thrain," said the drunk, leaning in, "a handsome carriage, and 'tis losht."

"Try farther on," suggested Delancey.

"Excuse me interrupting yeer conversation, gentlemen."

"That's all right, that's all right."

"I'm very melancholic. Me besht friend, I parted him thish very night, and 'tish known to no wan only the Almighty and merciful God"—here the drunk reverently raised his bowler hat and let it slide down the back of his neck to the floor—"if I'll ever lay eyes on him agin in thish world. Good night, gentlemen, and thanks, thanks for yeer kindness."

As the drunk slithered away up the corridor Delancey laughed. Fox resumed the conversation where it had left off.

"I'll admit," he said, "Delancey wasn't the only one."

"He was not," agreed Foley. "Even the sergeant was shook. When he caught up the mug he was trembling all over, and before he could let it down it danced a jig on the table."

"Ah, dear God! Dear God!" sighed Delancey, "what killed me most entirely was the bloody ould model of the house. I didn't mind anything else but the house. There it was, a living likeness, with the bit of grass in front and the shutter hanging loose, and every time I looked down at it I was in the back lane in Farranchreesht, hooshing the hens and smelling the turf, and then I'd look up and see the lean fellow in the wig pointing his finger at me."

"Well, thank God," said Foley with simple devotion, "this time to-morrow I'll be sitting in Ned Iver's back with a pint in my fist."

Delancey shook his head, a dreamy smile playing upon his dark face. "I dunno," he said. "'Tis a small place, Farranchreesht, a small, mangy ould *fothrach* of a place with no interest or advancement in it."

"There's something to be said on both sides," added Magner judicially. "I wouldn't say you're wrong, Foley, but I wouldn't say Delancey was wrong either."

"Here's the sergeant now," said Delancey, drawing himself up with a smile of welcome. "Ask him."

"He wasn't long getting tired of Julietta," whispered Magner maliciously.

The door was pushed back and the sergeant entered, loosening the collar of his tunic. He fell into a corner seat, crossed his legs and accepted the cigarette which Delancey proffered.

"Well, lads," he exclaimed. "What about a jorum?"

"By Gor," said Foley enthusiastically, "I was only talking about it!"

"I have noted before now, Peter," said the sergeant with heavy humour, "that you and me have what might be called a simultaneous thirst."

III

The country folk were silent and exhausted. Kendillon drowsed now and again, but he suffered from blood-pressure, and after a while his breathing grew thicker and stronger until at last it exploded in a snort, and then he started up, broad awake and angry. In the silence rain spluttered and tapped along the roof, and the dark window-panes streamed with shining runnels of water that trickled on to the floor. Moll Mor scowled, her lower lip thrust out. She was a great

flop of a woman with a big coarse, powerful face. The other two women, who kept their eyes closed, had their brown shawls drawn tight about their heads, but Moll's was round her shoulders, and the gap above her breasts was filled by a blaze of scarlet.

"Where are we?" asked Kendillon crossly, starting awake after one of his drowsing fits.

Moll Mor glowered at him.

"Aren't we home yet?" he asked again.

"No," she answered. "Nor won't be. What scour is on you?"

"Me little house," moaned Kendillon.

"Me little house," mimicked Moll. "'Twasn't enough for you to board the windows and put barbed wire on the ould bit of a gate!"

"'Tis all dom well for you," he snarled, "that have someone to mind yours for you."

One of the women laughed softly and turned a haggard virgin-like face within the cowl of her shawl.

"'Tis that same have me laughing," she explained apologetically. "Tim Dwyer this week past at the stirabout pot!"

"And making the beds!" chimed in the third woman.

"And washing the children's faces! Glory be to God, he'll blast creation!"

"Aye," snorted Moll, "and his chickens running off with Thade Kendillon's roof."

"My roof, is it?"

"Aye, your roof."

"'Tis a good roof. 'Tis a better roof than ever was seen over your head since the day you married."

"Oh, Mary Mother!" sighed Moll. "'Tis a great pity of me this three hours and I looking at the likes of you instead of me own fine bouncing man."

"'Tis a new thing to hear you praising him, then," said a woman.

"I wronged him," said Moll contritely. "I did so. I wronged him before the world."

At this moment the drunken man pulled back the door of the compartment and looked from face to face with an expression of deepening melancholy.

"She'sh not here," he said in disappointment.

"Who's not here, mister?" asked Moll with a wink at the others.

"I'm looking for me own carriage, ma'am," said the drunk with melancholy dignity, "and, whatever the bloody hell they done with it, 'tish losht. The railways in thish country are going to hell."

"Wisha, if 'tis nothing else is worrying you, wouldn't you sit here?" asked Moll.

"I would with very great pleasure," replied the drunk, "but 'tishn't on'y the carriage, 'tish me thravelling companion, as sympathetic a little woman as you could find in a life-time. . . . In a life-time. I'm a lonely man, I parted me besht friend this very night, then I found wan to console me, and when I turned me back—God took her!"

And with a dramatic gesture the drunk closed the door and continued on his way. The country folk sat up, blinking. The smoke of the men's pipes filled the compartment, and the heavy air was laden with the smell of homespun and turf-smoke, the sweet pungent odour of which had penetrated every fibre of their garments.

"Listen to the rain, leave ye!" said one of the women. "We'll have a wet walk home."

"'Twill be midnight before we're there," said another.

"Ah, sure, the whole country will be up."

"'Twill be like daylight with collogueing."

"There'll be no sleep in Farranchreesht to-night."

"Oh, Farranchreesht! Farranchreesht!" cried the young woman with the haggard face, the ravished lineaments of which were suddenly transfigured. "Farranchreesht and the sky over you, I wouldn't change places with the Queen of England this night!"

And suddenly, Farranchreesht, the bare boglands with the hump-backed mountain behind, the little white houses and the dark fortifications of turf that made it seem the flame-blackened ruin of some mighty city, all was lit up within their minds. An old man, sitting in a corner smoking a broken clay pipe, thumped his stick upon the floor.

"Well, now," said Kendillon darkly, "wasn't it great impudence in her to come back?"

"Wasn't it now?" answered a woman.

"She won't be there long," he added.

"You'll give her the hunt, I suppose?" asked Moll Mor politely, too politely.

"If no one else do I'll give her the hunt myself."

"Oh, the hunt, the hunt," agreed a woman. "No one could ever darken her door again."

"And still, Thade Kendillon," pursued Moll with her teeth on edge to be at him, "you swore black was white to save her neck."

"I did, of course. What else would I do?"

"What else? What else, indeed?" agreed the others.

"There was never an informer in my family."

"I'm surprised to hear it," replied Moll vindictively, but the old man thumped his stick three or four times on the floor requesting silence. They all looked at him.

"We told our story, the lot of us," he said, "and we told it well."

"We did so."

"And no one told it better than Moll Mor. You'd think to hear her she believed it herself."

"God knows," answered Moll with a wild laugh, "I nearly did."

"And still I seen great changes in my time, and maybe the day will come when Moll Mor and her likes will have a different story to tell."

A silence followed his words. There was profound respect in all their eyes. The old man coughed and spat.

"Did any one of ye ever think the day would come when a woman in our parish would do the like of that?"

"Never, never, ambasa!"

"But she might do it for land?"

"She might then."

"Or for money?"

"She might so."

"She might, indeed. When the hunger is money, people kill for money, when the hunger is land, people kill for land, but what are they killing for now? There's a great change coming—a great change. In the ease of the world people are asking more. When I was a growing boy in the barony, if you killed a beast you made six pieces of it, one for yourself and the rest for the neighbours. The same if you made a catch of fish, and that's how it was with us from the beginning of time. And now look at the change! The people aren't as poor as they were, nor as good as they were, nor as generous as they were, nor as strong as they were."

"Nor as wild as they were," added Moll Mor with a vicious glare at Kendillon. "Oh, glory be to You, God, isn't the world a wonderful place!"

The door opened and Magner, Delancey, and the sergeant entered. Magner was drunk.

"Moll," he said, "I was lonely without you. You're the

biggest and brazenest and cleverest liar of the lot, and you lost me my sergeant's stripes, but I'll forgive you everything if you'll give us one bar of the *Colleen Dhas Roo.*"

IV

" I'm a lonely man," said the drunk. " And now I'm going back to my lonely habitation. Me besht friend," he continued, " I left behind me—Michael O'Leary. 'Tis a great pity you don't know Michael, and a great pity Michael don't know you. But look now at the misfortunate way a thing will happen. I was looking for someone to console me, and the moment I turned me back you were gone."

Solemnly he placed his hand under the woman's chin and raised her face to the light. Then with the other hand he stroked her cheeks.

" You have a beau'ful face," he said, " a beau'ful face. But whass more important, you have a beau'ful soul. I look into your eyes and I see the beauty of your nature. Allow me wan favour. Only wan favour before we part."

He bent and kissed her. Then he picked up his bowler which had fallen once more, put it on back to front, took his dispatch-case and got out. The woman sat on alone. She was sorry to see the last of him.

Her shawl was thrown open and beneath it she wore a bright blue blouse. The carriage was cold, the night outside black and cheerless, and within her something had begun to contract that threatened to crush the very spark of life. She could no longer fight it off, even when for the hundredth time she went over the scenes of the previous day; the endless hours in the dock; the wearisome speeches and questions she couldn't understand, and the long wait in the cells till the jury returned. She felt it again, the shiver of mortal anguish that went through her when the Chief Warder beckoned

angrily from the stairs, and the wardress, glancing hastily into a hand-mirror, pushed her forward. She saw the jury with their expressionless faces, and in one man's hand the slip of paper that meant life or death for her. She was standing there alone, in nervous twitches jerking back the shawl from her face to give herself air. She was trying to say a prayer, but the words were being drowned within her mind by the thunder of nerves, crashing and bursting. She could feel one that had escaped dancing madly at the side of her mouth, but she was powerless to recapture it.

"The verdict of the jury is that Helena Maguire is not guilty." Which was it? Death or life? She couldn't say. "Silence! Silence! Silence!" shouted the usher, though no one had tried to say anything. "Any other charge?" asked a weary voice. "Release the prisoner." "Silence!" shouted the crier again. The Chief Warder opened the door of the dock and she began to run. When she reached the steps she stopped and looked back to see if she were being followed. A policeman held open a door and she found herself in an ill-lit, draughty stone corridor. She stood there, the old shawl about her face. The crowd began to emerge. The first was a tall girl with a rapt expression as though she were walking on air. When she saw the woman she halted suddenly, her hands went up in an instinctive gesture, as though she wished to feel her, to caress her. It was that look of hers, that gait as of a sleep-walker that brought the woman to her senses. . . .

But now the memory had no warmth in her mind, and the something within her continued to contract, smothering her with loneliness and shame and fear. She began to mutter to herself half-crazily. The train, now almost empty, was stopping at every little wayside station. Now and again a blast of wind from the Atlantic pushed at it as though trying to capsize it.

She looked up as the door was pushed open and Moll Mor came in, swinging her shawl behind her.

"They're all up the train. Wouldn't you come?"

"No, no, no, I couldn't."

"Why couldn't you? Who are you minding? Is it Thade Kendillon?"

"No, no, I'll stop as I am."

"Here! Take a sup of this and 'twill put new heart in you." Moll fumbled in her shawl and produced a bottle of liquor as pale as water. "Wait till I tell you what Magner said! That fellow's a limb of the divil. 'Have you e'er a drop, Moll?' says he. 'Maybe I have, then,' says I. 'What is it?' says he. 'What do you think?' says I. 'For God's sake,' says he, 'baptize it quick and call it whisky.'"

The woman took the bottle and put it to her lips. She shivered as she drank.

"'Tis powerful stuff entirely," said Moll with respect.

Next moment there were loud voices in the corridor. Moll grabbed the bottle and hid it under her shawl. The door opened and in strode Magner, and behind him the sergeant and Delancey, looking rather foolish. After them again came the two country women, giggling. Magner held out his hand.

"Helena," he said, "accept my congratulations."

The woman took his hand, smiling awkwardly.

"We'll get you the next time, though," he added.

"Musha, what are you saying, mister?" she asked.

"Not a word, not a word. You're a clever woman, a remarkable woman, and I give you full credit for it. You threw dust in all our eyes."

"Arsenic," said the sergeant by way of no harm, "is a poison hard to come by and easy to trace, but it beat me to trace it."

"Well, well, there's things they're saying about me!"

The woman laughed nervously, looking first at Moll Mor and then at the sergeant.

"Oh, you're safe now," said Magner, "as safe as the judge on the bench. Last night when the jury came out with the verdict you could have stood there in the dock and said, 'Ye're wrong, ye're wrong, I did it. I bought the arsenic in such and such a place, or so and so gave it to me. I gave it to him because he was old and dirty and cantankerous and a miser, because I was a young woman with the fire of the devil in me. I did it and I'm proud of it' You could have said every word of that and no one would have dared to lay a finger on you."

"Indeed! What a thing I'd say!"

"Well, you could."

"The law is truly a remarkable phenomenon," said the sergeant who was also rather squiffy. "Here you are, sitting at your ease at the expense of the State, and for one word, one simple word of a couple of letters, you could be lying in the body of the gaol, waiting for the rope and the morning jaunt."

The woman shuddered. The young woman with the ravished face looked up.

"'Twas the holy will of God," she said simply.

"'Twas all the bloody lies Moll Mor told," replied Magner.

"'Twas the will of God," she repeated.

"There was many hanged in the wrong," said the sergeant.

"Even so, even so! 'Twas God's will."

"You have a new blouse," said the other woman in an envious tone.

"I seen it last night in a shop on the quay," replied the woman with sudden brightness. "A shop on the way down from the court. Is it nice?"

"How much did it cost you?"

"Honour of God!" exclaimed Magner, looking at them in stupefaction. "Is that all you were thinking of? You should have been on your bended knees before the altar."

"I was, too," she answered indignantly.

"Women!" exclaimed Magner with a gesture of despair. He winked at Moll Mor and the pair of them retired to the next compartment. But the interior was reflected clearly in the corridor window and they could see the pale, quivering image of the policeman lift Moll Mor's bottle to his lips and blow a long, silent blast on it as on a trumpet.

Delancey laughed.

"There'll be one good day's work done on the head of the trial," said the young woman, laughing.

"How so?" asked the sergeant.

"Dan Canty will make a great brew of poteen while he have yeer backs turned."

"I'll get Dan Canty yet," replied the sergeant stiffly.

"You will, as you got Helena."

"I'll get him yet."

The sergeant consulted his watch.

"We'll be in in another quarter of an hour," he said. "'Tis time we were all getting back to our respective compartments."

Magner entered and the other policemen rose. The sergeant fastened his collar and buckled his belt. Magner swayed, holding the door frame, a mawkish smile on his thin, handsome, dissipated face.

"Well, good night to you now, ma'am," said the sergeant primly. "I'm as glad for all our sakes things ended up as they did."

"Good night, Helena," said Magner, bowing low and promptly tottering. "There'll be one happy man in Farranchreesht to-night."

"Come. Come, Joe!" protested the sergeant.

"One happy man," repeated Magner obstinately. "'Tis his turn now."

"Come on back, man," said Delancey. "You're drunk."

"You wanted him," said Magner heavily. "Your people wouldn't let you have him, but you have him at last in spite of them all."

"Do you mean Cady Driscoll?" hissed the woman with sudden anger, leaning towards Magner, the shawl drawn tight about her head.

"Never mind who I mean. You have him."

"He's no more to me now than the salt sea!"

The policeman went out first, the women followed, Moll Mor laughing boisterously at some drunken jest of Magner's. The woman was left alone. Through the window she could see little cottages stepping down through wet and naked rocks to the water's edge. The flame of life had narrowed in her to a pin-point, and she could only wonder at the force that had caught her up, mastered her, and thrown her aside.

"No more to me," she repeated dully to her own image in the window, "no more to me than the salt sea!"

Laura, Immortal

William Saroyan

The house was locked, dark, sullen, myself inside and my brother there, and in the yard the tall eucalyptus tree was black, quieter than a pebble, unbirded, in the deep pool of night, the porch of the house staring openly at my fear, the windows mocking it, no one inside, myself in the street, the whole earth empty, and every heart turned inward to secret.

There is no place to turn, I said. The earth is empty, the dream broken, and all that remains is a reality of hunger and a need of sleep. No one is home, I said, and the house, which is the earth, is empty, and I myself am out, and my brother is out, and all the others are away from the house. There is no place to go.

I stood before the house, shivering and groaning, breathing the fear of unplacement. There is no home, I said. No place to put away the body and be of the ancient dream, no space in which to rest, no steadied gloom in which to remember having lived, then, and there, and therefore now, and I said, there is no home for me.

The grief was too fierce, and I could not weep. I could not run to the door, as I wished, and smash it in, and go through the house, making it fall, destroying the place of my dream, since it was not home, since there was no home in any place of the earth, no hidden moment of roof and floor and wall, and I stood

in the street, hating the earth, sickening with the rage of belonging nowhere, not even in the house where my brother had his growth and my sisters their laughter.

This is the earth, I said, in which I am lost, the deepness in which I am lonely, the moment in which I strangle, and this is myself, alone, blood and bone, a form, a vision, a touch, a mind, dying, in this moment, of this place, and in all the moments of living, and in all the places of the earth. This is my name, my form, my face. Have I no right to dream, sleep dragging down my heart, fear sending my blood to mobs of deaths, no home, no home?

Homesick, I saw the other earth, and I saw Laura there, in the other city, at another door, speaking to me in another language, and I said, I have no home, Laura, and in every place of the earth I am lost, standing alone in desolation, and my blood weeps for the moment when, a moment ago somewhere lost but remembered, we walked together through a primal earth, unhampered by language, wise with innocence, a leopard following your hand, kissing it, a raven brooding above your head, ill with love, a reptile swimming over the earth at your feet, and I, Laura, adoring with these thy holiness.

Night darkened the house and I remembered. She sat across the aisle from me at school, a small Jewess, so much of all things good that I could study no lesson but the lesson of her inward smiling, balancing the earth, and I remembered myself going to class each morning with the dream of myself trembling, like rock trembling, at the thought of her, old blood violently refreshed by her presence, and I learned no lesson, and they said, "This boy is dreaming; he learns nothing; he cannot read and he cannot write; all day he dreams."

And I remembered my reply. I could not put it into words

since I knew no words, but I said, "I am learning something. Are you so blind that you cannot see her, this small Jewess? Do you not understand that this child is one whose poise is the poise of all things seen and unseen, shaped and unshaped. This smile of eye, of lip and brow and lash, of hand, has it no meaning for you? Is the meaning to be everlastingly in two times two, and if a farmer had six apples and gave away four, how many? Is the meaning of our substance, suddenly upright in this great valley, to be this, two times nothing four times? What of her lip and brow and lash, her hair, her mind, her movement from the room and into it each morning, from Jerusalem? What of Laura? Two times two? Six apples and four given away?"

Remembering her, she appeared in a dream I had dreamed and forgotten, the place where we had been together, in silence, knowing of one another, where we had walked, a whole new earth unfolding within me, ridiculing the earth I knew, and I stood before the dark house, waiting for a light in the window, the opening of a door, the presence of a brother, someone of my own flesh, so that I might enter, unafraid, and sleep the reality of my life, but I saw no light, the opening of no door, the form of no brother, and the longing for home stampeded inward to the other place, my heart running from fear and having no place to go.

Tearlessly, I wept for my brother, dreaming that he had died, and for my sisters, dreaming that all time had passed and their laughter ended, and for my mother, dreaming that her house had crumbled away, and myself, in the form of another, returning to the place and feeling strangely, Our house was here, it was here, I know it was here. Feeling, We lived here then, in those years, in this same valley, in this same air. My brother is dead, I dreamed. In no place of the earth is there laughter heard. The earth is empty, the house crumbled

away, the tree unbirded, all is ended, all, all but the ghost of myself moving down dark mortal streets seeking the place of my deathlessness.

I knew where Laura lived. It was a small house with two oleander trees growing in the front yard, and I began to walk through dark streets, afraid but now somehow fearless, feeling that I had no home and that knowing this there was no longer anything to fear. I knew. I walked as a thing still unformed and yet aware of its ultimate form, death and dispersal, sudden pebbling of flesh on alien shores, sudden leafage of tree limbs, sudden flashing of flowers, sudden rage in the bowels of the earth, earthquake and deluge, sudden riot, all of myself, now unformed, but because of my unplacement, of its ultimate form, one thing and all things, all substance, all movement, all articulation, stone, leaf, sea, sky, myself effaced but immortal.

At the gate of her house I was ill with adoration. This gate, I said, she has touched, and I touched it, my hand burning with the ghost of her touch. And looking at the house in which she lived I breathed the house into my lungs, worshipping it. At the gate, the earth I knew, the latest of the earths, became effaced, and this other, the one I was seeking, took its place. The moment was another moment. I wanted to go to the door of her house and knock softly, and ask if I might enter, if I might sleep there, being homeless, having no place to go, if I might sit at a table with her and eat, being hungry, if I might see her and not speak, knowing the futility of words, but I could not do it.

Angry with the thought, I remembered myself as I was, a gloomy and serious-faced boy, backward in his studies and a bit foolish, and I knew that it could not be. I wanted to go in, but I knew that I could not, since I was myself, and she herself, inevitably of the present moment and of the present earth.

I turned and began walking to the house where I lived, praying for a light in the window, someone there to speak to me, someone to destroy my unplacement, let me sleep, and when I reached the house, it was dark again, and the emptiness of the earth became an emptiness I could no longer bear, and I began to weep, my stomach groaning with hunger, my blood changing to stone, my breath bursting from me in sobs. I stood before the house, helpless and angry, feeling the desolation of my life from the first moment of its reality, on backward to the first moment of reality in the life of man, and while I wept I prayed and I cursed and I laughed, and my body, as if it were not a thing I possessed, leapt with rage, and I cried out wordlessly, my heart making a violence in the earth.

At length, I do not know when, or after how many minutes or hours or years, my brother rode from the city to the house on a bicycle, appearing miraculously on wheels, laughing at first at my grief, then not laughing, talking to me. "Ben, he said. Why are you crying, Ben?" In my heart I replied, A moment ago, you were dead, all of us were dead, the house was gone, the world was empty. I went to Laura's world and she was not there. I came back and the house was dark. I am alone, and I have no place to go, I have no home.

But I could not speak.

My brother opened the door of the house with a key and we went into the house and I saw that it was all there, the walls, the ceiling, the floor, the tables, chairs, beds, the stove, ourselves alive in the house, and it was so good, even the evanescence of our real life was so good that weeping I had to laugh and I began to beat the table with my fists, laughing and weeping. In my heart I said, I have no home, there is no place for me in which to live the other life, but this is the house in which I have this life, alone, of this earth and this time, and my brother brought out bread and cheese and we sat at the

table and while I ate, sustaining my outward life, the ghost of myself and of Laura, alive in the other earth, moved onward quietly, and I knew that it would be there always, hidden and secret and timeless, the substance of my shadow, my body in the vast body of the lost earth, beside the body of Laura, Immortal.

"Toomers"

David Hamilton

Dr. Hansell managed to get away from the hospital earlier than he expected. He was well up to time as he drove to the little cottage, perched precariously on the hillside, where the Musslewhites lived. Without knocking he opened the door and walked straight through the house to the veranda beyond. The old man was sitting in his wheeled-chair, a rug about his knees, and an old stumpy pipe in his mouth. He was always to be found so on any sunny day, looking out over the small town that lay below him. His snow-white hair and cheerful ruddy cheeks gave a false impression of health. His wife could be seen down the garden, cutting lettuces.

"Well, Musslewhite, who is ill here to-day—you or your wife?"

The old man, roused suddenly from a drowsy contemplation, looked up with a start.

"Oh, Doctor, 'tis you, is it? I'm glad to see you; my leg pains me something cruel, it do; sometimes I can scarcely bear it. Last night I never slept a wink, and those tablets you give me b'aint no good at all—begging your pardon, Doctor."

"I'm sorry to hear that, Musslewhite. You've been getting on so well lately, too, I was quite pleased with you. I thought it was your wife who wanted to see me."

"Not as I know of, Doctor. No, not as I know of. I'll call her up, and then maybe you'll take a look at the leg for me."

He began waving his paper in the air to attract his wife's attention.

"I've been thinking a tidy bit, I have, sitting up here; and I'm wondering, Doctor, whether maybe 'tis one of they there dratted toomers that I have?"

"What makes you think that, Musslewhite?"

"Well, they be mighty queer things, toomers; mighty queer things. Seems to me they comes just anyhow. Look at poor old Mrs. Yeo, as you was 'tending. They tells me she had a toomer as made her go all black like, and she swelled something terrible. 'Tis all very well for you to laugh, Doctor, but this toe of mine has took on a mighty funny colour—mighty funny."

"Is the toe worse, then, Musslewhite?"

"Must be, Doctor; it shoots that cruel I can't hardly abide it. Just this last day or so, 'tis, that it's been so bad. I know I shouldn't be here if it weren't for you, but I can't go on like this no longer. 'Tis like the screws, only more shooting like; I can't put me foot to the ground."

Mrs. Musslewhite, a large, kindly-faced woman with beautiful hair as white as her husband's, had by this time arrived, rather out of breath, in answer to the old man's signals.

"Ah, Doctor, I'm glad to see you, but I'm sorry——"

Her husband interrupted her.

"The doctor wants to look at the leg, Mother. He thinks as how maybe I have a toomer."

"Nonsense, Musslewhite. You are an old liar! I never said anything about tumours. You have got them on the brain."

The old man looked up with a startled expression.

"Oh, Doctor, I hope as 'tis nothing like that. A toomer on the brain; 'twould be awful! Did you hear tell of Mrs. Bickle's poor lad as died down Plymouth way of a toomer in his head? 'Floating brain', they called it. Don't say as how I've got one of them, Doctor."

The doctor laughed loudly. "I didn't say that you had a real tumour on your brain, but that you've got them on the brain; you are always talking about them."

"I gets your meaning now, all right, Doctor. 'Tis my mistake, I see. But you give me a terrible scare, Doctor. I don't want no toomer, I can tell you."

"Well, let's have a look at the leg, Mrs. Musslewhite."

Smiling at the doctor, and pulling up her trailing skirts—she always wore black alpaca—she knelt down beside the old man and proceeded to pull off one or two large socks which covered the bandaged limb. When it was all unwrapped, Dr. Hansell made a careful examination.

"Is this man of yours keeping to his diet, Mrs. Musslewhite?"

"Oh, well, Doctor, I can't honestly say as how he is. Fair fed up he is with boiled cabbage, and I can't say as how I blames him neither, although he eats his lettuce right enough, that he do, but he don't take his food as he used to. No relish, like."

"Ah!" said the old man. "Don't you pay no attention to my old woman, Doctor. I eats me grub all right, that I do."

"And his injections?"

"Oh, yes, Doctor. I gives them to him reg'lar, I do, just as you said, but he's getting that lumpy in his arms that I've started putting it in his legs now. His skin's mighty tough; I broke a needle right off a day or two ago, that I did."

"Well, I hope you didn't leave it in him," laughed the

RE: LOVAT DICKSON'S MAGAZINE, VOL. 4

PLEASE NOTE THAT PAGES 613-708 ARE MISNUMBERED PAGES 413-508. THIS VOLUME IS NOT DEFECTIVE. THE ERROR WAS MADE IN THE ORIGINAL EDITION AND IS NECESSARILY REPEATED IN THE REPRINT EDITION. THE EDITORIAL CONTENT CONTAINED IN THE SECOND SET OF PAGES NUMBERED 413-508 DOES NOT DUPLICATE THAT OF THE FIRST SET.

doctor. "Now, tell me the truth, Musslewhite. Have you had anything more to eat than is written down on the sheet? Come now, no monkeying about."

"Well now, Doctor," said the old man. "Maybe I've had a bit of bread and jam, or a bite of cream now and then—nothing much, so to speak."

Dr. Hansell looked annoyed.

"Really, Musslewhite," he exclaimed, "I'm fed up with you. Here am I, telling you to be most careful what you eat, and writing it all down so that there can be no mistake; and you go and do a damn' silly thing like that. The foot's all ulcerated again, and you've only got yourself to thank for it. Rheumatism, indeed! I expect your leg does hurt; it jolly well serves you right."

The doctor had cause for his annoyance. He had found the old man nearly dead with diabetic coma a year or two ago. Every day for months he had given him insulin, dieted him, and gradually got him well. At one time he looked like dying, but they managed to pull him round—he and the old woman between them. Now, in spite of all his advice and warnings, the old fool had gone and messed it up.

He felt quite upset. He had grown very fond of the old couple, and secretly was rather proud of the job.

"Well, Doctor, what about it? You can see for yourself how 'tis all black, like I told you. A mighty queer colour I calls it. I've heard tell of people as went all yellow with the bile—old man Yole was took that way—and Mrs. Puddick was telling how her daughter Annie, as is in service up along with Mr. Hardcastle, comed out all red like a beetroot through eating lobster; Mr. Hardcastle give her two big spoonfuls of castor oil to make her well; but I must say as how this blacking and purpling do seem mighty strange. 'Tis swelling, too; maybe 'tis a toomer all the time, and you bain't telling me,

Doctor. I'm sure I'm sorry if 'tis my fault, after all you've done for me, though."

"Oh well, Musslewhite, that's all right. After all, it's your affair and I know the diet is pretty rotten. How your wife keeps you in lettuces, I don't know; your garden seems to be full of them."

"Yes, Doctor," said Mrs. Musslewhite, "we gets through a tidy lot in the year, but it wouldn't do for him to be without them, would it? I gives him one every day, summer and winter."

"You've got a wonderful wife, Musslewhite."

"That I have and no mistake, and I don't want to be parted from her just yet, neither. Fifty years we'll have been married come October—so be as I'm spared. What about this here leg?"

Dr. Hansell considered the old man for some time. At length he spoke:

"Well, I may as well speak plainly. We know each other well enough for that. It's pretty bad, and I'm afraid you'll have to have it off, now that it's gone so far. If you don't, it will probably kill you."

"If I have it off, will the pain get better?"

"The pain will go, and you will be in much better health. It's for you to decide; but I cannot hide from you that for a man of your years it's a dangerous operation; and yet I think it more dangerous to leave it alone."

The silence which followed was soon broken by the old man's rambling voice.

"What exactly be the trouble, Doctor?"

"Why, man, I've just told you. The leg's going bad."

"Be that all that is wrong?"

"Yes, that's all, except, of course, the diabetes, which is the cause of all the trouble. Why?"

"Well, Doctor, 'tis this way. When old Mrs. Puddick was here telling me about her daughter Annie only a few days ago she also telled me how her brother had just such a pain in his leg—a cruel, shooting pain 'twas, same as mine, and he had it took off too, and it was one of they toomers, and he died. Now I hope this bain't no toomer, Doctor, for they be mighty queer things, toomers."

"For goodness' sake stop talking about tumours, Musslewhite. I really do assure you that this has nothing whatever to do with them."

With a sigh of relief the old man took his wife's hand, which was resting on his shoulder. There was another short silence. He stirred restlessly in his chair.

"What'll it be, Tom?" Mrs. Musslewhite said at last.

"Will it keep me longer with the old lady if I has it done, Doctor?"

"Yes, I think I can guarantee that."

The old man sat still, looking out over the town where the smoke was slowly rising in the still air. His eyes, always rather weak, were filled with tears.

"If you say 'tis all right, Doctor, I reckon that's enough for me, and the sooner the better. Mother, she agrees, I know. We don't want to part before we must."

The doctor's face cleared. "Good. I'm sorry you've got this extra trouble, but I think you have made the right decision. You can leave it all to me." He turned to pick up his hat.

Mrs. Musslewhite followed him as he left the veranda. Tears stood in her eyes.

"Will he be all right, Doctor? He's all I've got now. Tell me the truth, please, and no humming and hawing."

Dr. Hansell took her arm.

"Now, don't you worry yourself unnecessarily. It's serious, of course, but the chief danger is that the leg may not heal

up properly. However, we shall know that in about a week. I will get him into the hospital at once, and we will operate as soon as possible. I think he will pull through all right."

"And it bain't no toomer? He be that scared of toomers."

"Now, look here, Mrs Musslewhite, don't you start as well, please. I've heard enough about 'toomers' this morning to last me a lifetime. No, he hasn't got a tumour or anything like it. It's entirely due to the diabetes."

"I'm glad to hear you say so, Doctor. I was afraid you might be keeping something back like." The old lady put her hand to her side; for a moment she seemed to stagger. The doctor supported her.

"Cheer up, now; it might be much worse. You must be brave, he will need you, you can see how he depends on you." He opened the front door.

"I thought from the message that you sent me this morning that it was you who was ill. Are you sure you are quite well?"

The old lady had recovered herself.

"Yes, Doctor, thank you, I'm quite meself again now. 'Twas the shock of it all; a bit sudden like."

She was following him down the garden path.

"Will you take a few flowers for the wife, Doctor? I know how she likes them."

"Thank you very much, Mrs. Musslewhite, I should like to. May I call in for them later on, when I come and tell you about the hospital?"

"Very good, Doctor, they shall be ready for you," replied the old woman.

She remained at the gate, watching him as he started his car, and waved to him as he drove off. Her hand was again pressed against her chest as she walked slowly back to the house.

Twice a day for a whole week Mrs. Musslewhite, dressed in her best black alpaca, tramped down the hot, dusty road to the distant hospital, and twice a day she trudged wearily back up the hill in the broiling sun. At first she was only allowed to remain for a few moments in the sick room, just long enough to arrange some of the flowers she picked with such care before each visit. Having settled everything to her satisfaction she would sit beside him quietly holding his hand in her own. Every now and then he would turn his head towards her; her smile was always waiting for him. Her visits cheered him wonderfully. From one visit to another he lay quietly looking at the flowers she had placed so that his view was not obstructed by the large cradle which supported the bedclothes.

Every day they told her that he was " going on nicely ", and every day she found the climb home more and more fatiguing. At the end of the first week Dr. Hansell told her that the leg was healing well and that her husband would make a splendid recovery. Somehow the news did not seem to register properly.

" What's the matter, Mrs. Musslewhite? You look worried to death. There is really no cause for anxiety now."

" 'Tis nothing, Doctor. The walk up and down tires me, but I likes to keep cheerful for Tom; he expects it."

" Well, don't worry any more," said the doctor, as he left her.

She was now allowed to visit him for longer periods. At the appointed time she was always quietly waiting in the hall with her flowers. The hospital staff decided that they were a couple of dears; he was a model patient, and she was a model visitor. On one subject only did she show any definite opinion, and that was about lettuces. She was convinced that no hospital lettuce could possibly be as good as those grown in her own garden.

At the end of three weeks he was taken home in the ambu-

lance, minus a leg, but marvellously restored in health. On the following day, Dr. Hansell found him once more on the veranda in his wheeled chair. He looked glum.

"Why, Musslewhite, what's the matter? Aren't you pleased to be home?"

"That I be, Doctor, mighty pleased, I can assure you. I daresay if it weren't for you I'd be nailed up in me coffin nice and proper by now. I wouldn't go through it again, though; too much washing and suchlike for me. Who would have thought that a chap like me would be washed and dressed by they pretty nurses, though. Made me fair squirm, it did."

"Go on with you, Musslewhite. I expect you enjoyed it."

"Well, maybe, maybe!" The old man made a poor pretence at a laugh.

"Come now, man, what's worrying you?"

"Ah, Doctor, 'tis the old woman. Fair wore out she is with toiling up and down that dratted road, and I never noticed it." His eyes filled with tears.

"Ill she be too, Doctor; I doubt you can do anything for her. When I was laying in bed beside her last night, she was turning and twisting most plaguey like. At last I couldn't bear it nohow, so I woke her up. 'Mother,' I ses, 'what's the matter with 'ee, you're twisting something awful?' ''Tis me chest, Tom,' she said. 'It hurts me cruel.' I put me hand to her chest and felt a mighty big lump, Doctor, as big as me fist. Fair shook me, it did. 'Tis my belief she's got a toomer."

As he spoke Mrs. Musslewhite appeared in the doorway. Dr. Hansell turned round to her, and was shocked to see how worn and tired she looked.

"What's all this I hear about a lump, Mrs. Musslewhite?" he asked kindly. "Let me have a look at it."

"Oh, 'tis nothing, Doctor, only Tom's fancy."

"Fancy!" exclaimed the old man. "'Tis a great big toomer

that you have, Mother, and none knows it better than you do yourself. Keeping it dark from me you was, you wicked woman, and now I shall lose you." The tears were running down his cheeks in real earnest.

"Come, come, Musslewhite, don't carry on like that. I don't expect it's anything at all. Let me see it, Mrs. Musslewhite, please."

Dr. Hansell peremptorily pushed the old lady inside the room and shut the door.

After a while they re-appeared, the old lady buttoning up her bodice.

"Well, Doctor," said the old man, "tell me straight now. Be it a toomer or bain't it a toomer?"

Dr. Hansell looked down at the old face turned up so anxiously.

"For once you are right, Musslewhite. It is a tumour—of a kind."

"Ah, I thought so; 'tis cancer then." His grip tightened on his wife's hand. "And she knew it all the time and never told me. Oh, Mother!"

"Yes, she's been worrying about it all the time you have been ill. I don't know which of you most deserves a thorough scolding. You, Mrs. Musslewhite, for not letting me look at it when I was up here the other day—I see I was right, and you did want me to see it really, only I suppose you thought it would worry your husband—or you, you old rascal, with your 'toomers'. I have already explained to your wife that she has not got cancer. She has a simple lump of fat which we doctors call a fatty tumour. It is absolutely harmless, and can easily be removed if it causes pain, as it does in this case. And for heaven's sake give up thinking about 'toomers', Musslewhite. There are lots and lots of different kinds, and you know nothing about any of them."

Mrs. Musslewhite laughed quietly and stroked her husband's hand.

"There, Tom, I told you 'twas nothing."

"Nothing! I know as how you near drove yourself mazed with the worry of it."

He took the doctor's hand. "Thank 'ee, Doctor. 'Tis a great relief to me mind. I may be a silly old fool, but say what you will, toomers is mighty queer things."

The Snowstorm

Violet M. MacDonald

ELIZABETH read half-way through the letter, then stopped, dropped her hand on her knee and laughed aloud. She read again from the beginning and stopped as before, laughed as before, and then frowned. She read on to the end, her mood turning from incredulity to anger, then to fear, then to curiosity and a faint sense of excitement. She was completely bewildered.

"The man's mad," she said.

Months before, in the summer, she had been ferreting about in the country, hunting up the records of some local worthy for a literary friend, who had made the errand a pretext for helping her to a much-needed holiday. Her headquarters for the week had been an ancient and singularly quiet inn, in whose tiny parlour she had spent solitary evenings, save for the occasional erruption of a farmer or two with their wives, or a passing cyclist. On the last evening of all a stranded motorist had come, leaving his refractory car to the tender mercies of the neighbouring blacksmith, who thought he could "fix something to carry on with".

So he told her. She had been writing letters at the time, and had taken no notice of his entrance. But the landlady, bringing his sherry, had broken the ice by some chance

remark, had drawn her in and left her involved in a conversation which had then developed as suddenly and deliberately as though the meeting had been planned. She was sucked into it, drawn under in a defenceless sort of condition, listening in amazement to an outpouring of personal history, countering it with fragments of her own: important fragments, flung down at random with a queer sense of detachment, as though this were an eddy in the stream of existence, a gap in which ordinary relationships were suspended and personal reticence had no place. And this was all the more strange because while the coin she tossed him was true, she knew that some of his rang counterfeit.

He was so happy nowadays, he assured her. All these difficulties there had been, at some time or another in his life, but he had weathered them all. Life as *they* had arranged it now was the ideal solution. *They* were agreed upon that. They agreed in everything. . . .

Why was he telling her all this, she had wondered. What was there at the back of this rush of words that was meant for her to hear? In the end he had asked for her address because, he said, he knew someone who might have more light to throw on the subject of her researches there. If he could discover anything of value he would send it on to her.

She had come back to her letters with a slight sense of disruption, such as one experiences standing on the platform of a railway station after an express has hurtled through, leaving a quivering air and a little twirling rubbish in its wake. But it had soon subsided. In the months that had followed she had lost all but a hazy impression of his person and a more distinct remembrance of a voice that ran up and down, excitedly, like a child's voice, but always with an undertone she could not seize.

Now he had written to give her the promised information—

a couple of dates and a detail or two that might be of use to her friend.

"I'm so glad to have this excuse," he went on, "or I might never have had the courage to write at all. As it is, when you've read a little farther you'll tear my letter up, most likely, and that will be the end of it. Or perhaps you won't. I don't know what to think. Anyway, I'll risk it."

"Half of what I told you that day wasn't true, and I don't want to put the truth in this letter, because it wouldn't be fair. But I could *tell* you, and I believe you would listen, and if you would, just for once, I believe it would help me to see my way through all sorts of things more clearly. Now it happens that for two days next week I shall be absolutely and entirely alone here. The house is isolated; we have no neighbours; and if I fetched you from London in the car on Thursday and took you back on Friday, *no one would ever know*."

It was here that she had broken off and laughed. The phrase was so unexpected, the underlining so melodramatic. At the second reading it infuriated her, and her fingers twitched to tear the letter in half. She was not used to doing things by stealth. But she read on, angry, incredulous, alarmed, and yet faintly pleased to find herself so remembered, so appealed to, and in such terms, trying to evoke some distincter image of the writer and recapturing only the voice, running up and down excitedly, as a child's voice does, and the rush of words that had left such a quivering silence behind.

The rest of the letter was explicit only as to the possibility of sitting by a log fire to thrash out all sorts of questions, and the reasons—some sort of presentiment apparently—for his belief that she could help him out. But common sense told her she could not leave it at that; and immediately two views

of the situation began to fight for the mastery of her mind; commonplace adventure to be indignantly shunned, or vital experience in which she was already, as he seemed to suggest, to some extent involved.

"If I hear nothing by Wednesday," the letter concluded, "I shall know you have turned me down. But if you *will* come, just send me a line acknowledging the first part of this letter."

This gave her a respite, anyhow, and she decided to sleep on it. To-morrow, perhaps, the obvious decision would resolve itself out of the chaos of her present thoughts. Do what she would, however, through the great part of the night the two aspects of the affair kept running alternately across her mind with the weaving rhythm of a shuttle, and under the weaving lay a warp of fear she could not blink; the man might be mad.

In the morning, with the aptness of a sign from heaven, came a letter from a country friend announcing her visit to London on the following Thursday. "Do meet me for lunch," it said, "I shan't be up again for ages, and it's so long since we met."

Perversely enough, she felt exasperated, and consigned the friend to limbo on the spot. "What bad luck," she wrote, "I shall be away the best part of that week." She deliberately overstated it, so as to be left in peace, so as to give herself the chance of changing her mind up to the last minute. And then the folly, the absurdity of the whole thing rushed over her again, and lunch at her friend's club seemed the hand of Providence held out.

But she posted the letter and waited for her thoughts to settle. On the Sunday she visited some friends, and deliberately turnd her mind to other things, with the result that by Tuesday evening she found herself disentangled from her

cowardice and prepared to face all possibilities. The last few years had had a tinge of greyness about them, from which this adventure promised a strange, mad, momentary escape, something so incredible that she need render account of it to no one but herself. "And after all, life itself isn't so precious as all that nowadays,"she reflected, a little bitterly, in conclusion.

But as she sat down to acknowledge his letter an idea occurred to her.

"Thank you so much for the particulars you give me," she wrote, "but there's just one point I'm not quite clear about. It's a shame to bother you any further, but could you tell me whether it was Langley senior or Langley junior who founded the local literary club?"

She laughed as she signed the letter. It reminded her of the game of "Secret Dispatches" she had invented with some cousin as a child.

But she achieved her object, for early the next evening the telephone bell rang and the "Wait a minute, please, . . . *You're* thrrrrough," prepared her for a trunk call.

"Is that Mrs. Norton?"

"Yes."

"I say, I've got your letter, but I'm not quite sure what it means. . . ."

The voice was faint at first, and she listened intently to catch the tone.

". . . I mean, are you coming, or aren't you quite sure?"

It was louder now, and recognizable. More than that, it was normal, cheerful, sane.

"It means," she said, burning most of her boats, "that I'd like to come, but there are questions I want to ask you first. After all, we've only had an hour's conversation so far, and you've left me so much in the dark."

She heard a chuckle. "Yes, I know. I know it's rather absurd . . ."

"Well," she went on, "can you be here early enough for us to have half an hour's talk before we start off again? You've got a long way to come, haven't you?"

"The best part of eighty miles."

"As much as that? It's worse than I thought."

"But I can easily be with you by one, and we can start again at two—or does that sound too much like asking myself to lunch?"

"Come to lunch, of course, that will be much the best way."

"Don't bother about me, you know, a sandwich does for me. . . . So I may really come and talk it over?"

"Yes, you may."

"I say, that's awfully . . ." And here the operator cut them off.

She settled in her mind, before going to sleep, the questions she meant to ask him, the stipulations she intended to make. But the nightmarish sense of folly had vanished.

She slept late, and became aware on awakening of some peculiar quality in the light upon her ceiling. It seemed to have focused itself there, giving a sense of more than usual illumination at this wintry season. She glanced at the clock. Half-past eight. Why this Sabbath silence?

She sprang out of bed, and could not repress a cry of dismay. Sifting down past the window she saw a fine, dense, veil of snow. The whole world had turned a pale, ashen colour: furry blocks of wall and roof and chimney outlined dimly on a pinkish sky.

"He'll never come," she told herself, wondering how such a transformation could have effected itself in so little time.

The snow must have started overnight, to be lying so deep already.

The flat felt deathly cold, and she raked out and relighted the sitting-room fire before going to her bath.

She breakfasted by the fire, and then set to work to tidy the flat, expecting every moment to hear the telephone bell ring. But at eleven, since nothing had happened, she decided to go out and buy provisions. She would need lunch herself, even if he didn't come, she told herself; but at her return she set out a meal for two. Twelve o'clock passed, and at one the factory hooters blared out into the silence with teazing insistence. "There! That's the end of that!" they seemed to say.

But ten minutes later her door-bell rang, and she ran swiftly down the long flights of stairs like an automaton. She had the street door open before her mind had begun to work, and they greeted each other with an embarrassed smile.

"Come in. You must be frozen," she said, drawing him in out of the cold. Behind him, beside the kerb, stood a tiny car, laden with snow.

"I live at the top of the house," she explained, leading the way; and as she closed the door of the flat behind them she added, "When I saw the snow this morning I didn't think you would start."

"It's much worse in the country," he told her, "because it's drifted. But nothing would have stopped me." And he laughed. "Your clock's fast. I'm really only five minutes late."

"Do get warm by the fire while I heat the soup," she begged him; but he insisted on helping her. They drew the table near the fire and sat down. He gave her the details of his journey—of his early start, to be on the safe side.

It was curious how little she had remembered of his face.

He reminded her now of someone known to her years ago, almost in childhood. She would have to go back a long way, she felt, to read him aright.

They had coffee, turning their chairs to the fire; and as he helped himself to sugar he took the plunge. "Now tell me what it is that's bothering you," he said.

"The secrecy, of course," she answered, "I hate this hole and corner business."

"I know. So do I. But there was no other way, really. And I think in this case it's justified."

"Couldn't you have stayed in London? That would have been so much better," she suggested.

"No," he said. "It wouldn't mean the same to me. I want you to see the house. I want you to get to know me where I belong, so that you will understand, and so that our meeting will remain real to me afterwards, because of the things you've touched and looked at. And it's not only me you're going to help, remember. If I can see it all from the outside, it may make a difference to her too."

"Well, but tell me *about* your wife," said Elizabeth, "I don't understand. You said you were so happy."

"We used to be happy. I'm still very fond of her. But we're all at sixes and sevens now. I've lost a lot of money since the War—put a lot into cotton when it was booming, and lost every penny of it. She's sore about that, because her people were against it at the time. And other things aren't paying as they used to (everybody's in the same boat I suppose) so I can't help thinking the only way is to sell the estate, house and all, and go and live in some quiet little place."

Elizabeth made a gesture of assent, but he took her up.

"It'd be an awful wrench for me, you know. The place has been ours for generations."

"Of course. . . I know. . ."

"But there are big mortgages on it, and it doesn't seem much use. . . ."

"What does your wife say?"

"She wants to keep it for her boy. She was a widow when I married her, you know, with a boy of her own, and I've adopted him. She refused to have another child, though I'd have given anything to have a son of my own. Still, I'm almost as fond of this one as if he *were* my own. Only," he turned a rueful face to Elizabeth, calling her to witness the unreasonableness of women, "only, now she's jealous of his caring for me, so I'm never in the right."

"Is there any money coming to the boy, so that he can run the estate another day?" asked Elizabeth.

"Her people have some money, and I think that's what she's banking on. She's up there now, discussing things with them. But she doesn't realize what a lot of money a place like this runs away with, and how badly in debt we shall be by the time we come into any. Her people aren't shelling out now, that's very certain."

"What do you really want to do?"

"I don't know. That's just the point. I want to get away from a false situation, from all this pretence and keeping up appearance. We're only living in a corner of the house as it is, and I feel that we should be just as happy—much happier in fact—in a cottage somewhere, and all we saved would help to send the boy to college. . . . And then I funk it. I dread the wrench, and the way she'll take it—it might break up everything between us."

"But where do I come in?" asked Elizabeth, puzzled.

"You come in," he said, "because you're the only person I've ever met who belongs to both worlds. I mean, we began the same, but you've chucked all that, or it's chucked you, and you don't mind. You've knocked about, and settled down

among people who don't care two hoots for money or position, probably, so long as they can get other things they want more. So you can see both sides. You know what there is to give up and what there is to gain. You can hold the balance fairly, because you've been through the struggle yourself and got outside it once for all. That's true, isn't it?"

"Yes, it's true," said Elizabeth.

"You know," he went on, "I really did have an extraordinary feeling when I walked into that pub. As though everything was happening twice as fast as usual. 'Come along, come along, it's waiting,' I felt. And when I saw you sitting there I knew just what was going to happen. I knew I'd only got to clear out the landlady and start off. I wasn't a bit afraid of you. Only when it came to talking about *her* I felt it wasn't fair somehow—not there, not just yet. And I puzzled and puzzled how to get hold of you again. I can hardly ever get away by myself, you know. . . . And then this opportunity came. You won't let it slip, will you?" he went on anxiously, "You *will* come?"

"Yes," she said, "if I can really help, and it's the only way. But in that case you must promise me that the secrecy is really foolproof."

He looked at her very hard.

"Oh, not for myself," she assured him. "I'm not afraid in that way. But it would be damnable to hurt someone else."

He drew a long breath of relief. "It's really all right," he said. "I've thought of everything. Absolutely everything. The woman who works for us by day is laid up and can't come for a week. The nearest village is three miles off and the nearest station seven."

"That sounds a little sinister," said Elizabeth, smiling. "Do you know, it's more than once crossed my mind that this

adventure might be going to end in a hastily dug grave in a corner of your garden."

"You thought I might be cracked. I don't wonder. I've had qualms about you too," he admitted. "For all I knew, there might be someone in the background who would make it hot for me another day."

"I told you I had no ties," she said. "There's no one to come down on *you*." She burst out laughing. "What a crazy affair this is!" she cried. "Here are we planning a sort of elopement, and confessing we've been afraid of murder and blackmail."

"You aren't afraid now?" he asked her.

"No, not now."

"Nor am I. So lets' be off. It's not going to be an easy drive."

"Right. I'll rake out the fire and put the guard on."

"No, let me do that. You don't *mind* the long drive? You won't be cold?"

"No, I shall enjoy it. I'll wrap up in everything I can find."

The car looked very tiny, a forlorn little hermit-crab's shell standing by the kerb. But they settled into it more comfortably than she had expected, and she felt a positively childish thrill at setting out into the unknown in anything so frail—it might have been an affair of chairs and string in the nursery. The street was empty, the houses were grey against the colourless sky, and all noises deadened by the heavy wadding of snow.

There was seldom much traffic in the side streets of this northern suburb, and the car, threading its way steadily towards the fringe, was soon out on a broad road leading northward into a part of the country Elizabeth had never seen. In her mind till then it had been a green patch on the map, low-lying, flat, intersected by little rivers, stretching for miles

beside the central spine. But now the map was white, with wavering lines of hedge and copse finely engraved upon it. She caught herself guessing at the scale of it—two inches to the mile, perhaps—so dim and unreal it lay around her under the veil of drifting snow.

The little car held the road well, in spite of slithery expanses here and there on the surface, where other traffic had preceded them. Elizabeth glanced at her companion's hands, firm and sinewy on the wheel: easy concentration was in the set of his shoulders, the steadiness of his forward gaze.

"I'm a safe driver," he said, echoing her thoughts.

"I can see you are," she answered, "I trust you entirely."

"Good. I want you to trust me." And he smiled.

Decidedly there were long-past associations that were called up for her by the face she now saw in profile at her side. The rounded chin, the deep-set eye put her on the track of youthful adorations long outgrown. It was the type, so well-known to her then, whose instinct with animals is always flawless—the right gesture, the right tone, the right approach. But with human beings? There he might fail, she felt, as she looked at him, from having too few categories in which to range them. Good fellows and scoundrels, women who need protecting and women who don't—she suspected him of knowing no others, and that quite often he might be bewildered, caught at a disadvantage, by problems less simple than these would cover.

Into what category, for instance, was he putting her? Hardly among the helpless feminine, since it was on a belief that she had found, unaided, the solution he was seeking, that he was building. Yet that belief, she felt, was a little disturbing to him: a woman so self-reliant might be dangerous. The tension of his thoughts, which she suspected, seemed communicating itself to her by a sort of physical radiation. She found she was gripping the sill of the window beside her,

holding herself rigidly aloof. She relaxed, let her shoulder rest naturally against his, and felt the strain slacken for them both. By and by he spoke.

As he elaborated his problem she saw increasingly that she had guessed aright in the main. His wife, of necessity, was a being to protect. His obligation in the matter was all the greater, it appeared, that he had persuaded her to marry him in preference to a richer man, whose affairs, unlike his own, had prospered since the War. He did not seem to think of her as a person capable of exercising free will. All she was doing now, without consulting him, was brought about by the influence of "her people". Yet the more he told of her, the more his wife emerged as a self-reliant, calculalting, if not perhaps very well-advised individual. Elizabeth could only listen, questioning softly here and there, fearing as yet to disagree; and after a time he fell silent again.

His face now was a silhouette against the window. The headlights of the car threw two white shafts into space, and the windscreen clicked steadily back and forth, clearing the fine dust of snow from the glass as it drove and drove against it ceaselessly. The world seemed dissolving under the gentle, insistent action of the snow, that was seen to be twisting in slow spirals across the light.

Suddenly he pulled up. "Now we're blocked," he said, lowering the window and peering out. Shouts were heard, and lights moved in the dusk ahead.

"What is it?" asked Elizabeth.

"I don't know. I'd better go and see." And he left her in the car and went away to reconnoitre.

"There's a lorry stuck in a drift," he said, when he came back, "jammed up with a wagon. Right across the road."

Elizabeth laughed. In this disintegrating world nothing was real enough to matter.

"There are three cars held up in front of us," he went on, "and some more coming along behind."

"What are you going to do?"

"D'you mind getting out and going a little way ahead? I don't want to upset you in the snow."

She got out obediently, and walked past the waiting line of cars. They had drawn in a little towards the middle of the road, but the space between the wagon and the bank looked very small. She passed it and looked back, waving her hand. The little car started, accompanied by shouts, and drove unswervingly down the narrow passage, missing the wagon by an inch.

"They said I couldn't do it," he said gleefully, as he helped her in, "and not one of the others will dare."

"Only a Cinderella's coach like this could get through," she teazed him.

"Now, don't you abuse my car."

The adventure had shaken them out of their serious mood. They discovered that they were hungry, and pulled up in the next town they came to for a heterogeneous meal. The inns looked gloomy and forbidding, but a teashop supplied them with food of sorts, and hot drinks, and a blazing fire that they were loth to leave.

For the rest of the journey the road was a white tunnel progressively bored out of blackness, and Elizabeth sat bemused, as though the windscreen wiper and the whirling snow were making hypnotic passes before her eyes.

A sudden change of direction aroused her. She was aware of stone gate-posts and snow-laden shrubs, and then with another swift turn the journey ended: the car was stationary beside a low-built door.

"We always come in the back way nowadays," he explained, "it saves such a lot of trouble."

He drew the key from its hiding place under the scraper and let her in, flashing an electric torch to show her the way.

"How warm it feels!" she said, appreciatively, standing, a little dazed still, in the long white passage that led away, as the road had done, into darkness.

"That's the boiler," he told her. "I stoked it up to bursting this morning before I left."

He pushed open a baize-covered door and led her up a narrow, uncarpeted staircase to the next floor. The passage they emerged upon seemed cavernous about the waving light of the torch, but at the opening of another door a soft glow of firelight welcomed her. The remains of a huge pile of logs and coal lay smouldering in an open fireplace, and blazed up at a touch as he raked them together.

"That's more cheerful," he said. "Do you mind sitting here for a moment while I get a light?"

When he had gone she looked about her at the room, as it revealed itself here and there in the light of the darting flames. It was strange, of course, and yet familiar in its essentials: the glistening chintzes, the little tables, the fashionable weeklies scattered on the chairs.

He came in again, carrying a lamp. "We used to make our own electricity," he said apologetically, "but it was too expensive, so we've gone back to this."

Now the illusion was complete. With the smell of the wood fire and the scent—surely—of dried rose-leaves somewhere about the room—mingling with this faint but inescapable tang of paraffin, she was back in the story of her youth, about to turn the unread page that she had somehow missed.

"May I show you over the house?" he asked her, "or are you too tired?"

"Tired? Not a bit. I'd love to see it, of course."

He led her first to a room across a passage that was softly

lighted by a little lamp and by a leaping fire. The flames threw the shadows of the bedposts towards her over the counterpane, and lighted the memory of nights in just such a bed, fevered with the pangs of youthful unrequited love. For of course she had been in love with all those young creatures of the past, with their glamour and dashing gaiety, and the traditional chivalry that had made them behave kindly to her in spite of themselves.

They had found her dull, unattractive, a little odd. She had seen their eyes light up for other women, and heard their voices quiver on a new note. She had danced with them, trying to be unaware, in the happiness of having their arms about her, how their glances followed others round the ball-room.

"This is my room," said her guide. "I've tried to make it comfortable for you."

She praised the fire, already in such a glow. "How did you manage it?"

"I laid it very carefully," he told her, "and rushed in to light it just now. I didn't want your room to look cold and strange."

"You must be a magician," said Elizabeth. The room welcomed her. It acknowledged her right to be there.

"But now you'll want your coat again." He had it on his arm, and helped her into it. "The rest of the house will be horribly cold."

He took a hurricane lamp from a table in the passage, and led her down to a swing door that shut off this little inhabited corner of the house. As it swung to, softly, behind them, she had a strange sense of having gone still farther back in time.

He took her first into the library, a great long room with lofty, shuttered windows, and bookcases reaching to the ceiling. As he swung the lantern up, she saw that these were for the most part empty. In the lower shelves a few folios leant

forlornly against each other here and there; along the shallow topmost ones ran an assortment of little calf-bound volumes, incomplete sets of the *Spectator*, the *Rambler*, the *Monthly Magazine*, that the dealers had scorned when they cleared the rest away.

"The books were all sold in my father's time," he said. "That's his portrait over the mantelpiece."

He shifted the lantern, and the features defined themselves amid the blur of the glazing on the paint. The same eyes. The same chin.

A portrait filled the space above the door at either end of the room, taking the story of the race back two generations, telling it with the same features, the same air of romanticism, of obstinate quixotry. The faces, glowing sombrely amid the brilliance of the uniforms, were all the more alive in the lofty, shrouded room, for the emptiness of the shelves, that made Elizabeth think of rifled tombs.

Their steps sounded hollowly on the polished boards as they made their way to the farther door.

It gave on a broad landing from which the two arms of a wide staircase swept down to the entrance-hall. On one of these their footfalls were now muted entirely by a deep carpet; and the lantern, flashing regularly from portrait to portrait as they moved downwards, showed the race receding steadily farther into the past. Above the suits of armour in the hall hung the portraits of those who had worn them, and the light, calling out the gleams of real and pictured steel, translated them to Elizabeth's inner ear to faint, metallic clashings.

They threaded a sequence of ceremonial rooms, with tall windows shuttered, chandeliers veiled, and furniture of several periods standing meaningly grouped, like actors awaiting the rise of a curtain, who had meanwhile fallen asleep.

Their journey brought them back to the hall, and for a

moment they paused, caught by the hush within and the hush without. On the steps beyond the great entrance door they could feel the cold pressure of the mounting snow, its muffling carpet that evened the steps, merging the lowest with the paving of the court, the court itself with the roadway and the wide, flat park, the park with the limitless world. They had come to the outskirts of time, and only a door barred them from eternity.

Elizabeth shivered. He led her up the other arm of the staircase, beneath the portraits of the women who had inspired the dreams and swayed the lives of the men facing them across the way. No two of them were alike, save in their air of complete detachment, of utter unconcern for the beings that gazed on them from the opposite wall. Fresh from the hands of would-be Vandycks and Lelys, they had an inward gaze of concentration or a mocking stare that made them impervious to the dreams, the devotions, the silent, impassioned appeal that still flowed towards them across the dim gulf of time.

From the landing they turned this time into a corridor, and at the end of that into a room where Elizabeth felt her breath catch sharply, as though a presence, disturbed and put to flight, had glanced back at her from the farther door: her own ghost, or his, she could not have said which. The tall fender, the rocking-chair, the framed "coloured supplements" with their bye-gone sentimentality, had brought her with a jolt into a past that was still emotionally near.

In a corner stood a rocking-horse, with nostrils distended and eyes agleam, staring bravely into space.

"I used to ride that horse for hours at a time," he said, "making up all sorts of adventures for myself."

"I had a rocking-horse too," said Elizabeth.

She leaned against the door-frame, taking it all in. The

pilgrimage of the mind begun here in firelit security, the arduous journey; and the crumbling of dreams in the light of day. She felt knit to him suddenly in a strange solidarity, as though she could barely disentangle her identity from his.

A sigh, hers or his, broke the spell. He closed the door, and they made their way back to the sitting-room, where the tang of paraffin and the crumbling rose-leaves hung heavier than before in the warmth of the fire.

For a moment they sat in silence. Then he laughed. "Now that I've got you here, I'm shy of you," he told her.

"I'm shy too," said Elizabeth. "It's absurd. But I know what it is. You've been planning the whole thing beforehand —what you would say, and what I would answer—and now we've both got stage fright. Come here. . . ." She patted the sofa on which she was sitting. "I'm real. You can put your arm round me, and say the first thing that comes into your head."

"That's better," he conceded, as they leaned back among the cushions, her head on his breast.

"Now we can talk," said Elizabeth. "Tell me all about yourself from the beginning."

But it was not so simple. He zigzagged, as a snipe does at the outset of its flight. He related this incident and that, threw the torch-gleams on a lonely childhood merging swiftly into adolescence, upon the War, that had followed as swiftly, and from which he seemed to have emerged less shaken than many: putting the memory of it behind him as of a traditional duty traditionally accomplished. *There* was not the rub.

A log fell away from the burning pile on the hearth, and shot a stream of embers in their direction. He rose, replaced the log, and swept the embers back with an absorbed expression. He took a turn about the room.

Elizabeth felt a break of some kind impending. The thread spinning between them was wearing thin. She sat quiet, letting all he had told her so far coalesce into an image of him, with which to maintain contact.

Once more, half consciously, she slackened her pose, as though to relax a physical tension, and her gaze shifted from the fire to a little bookcase on the wall by her side. The light played on the titles. Prose and verse, they ranged through several centuries: in the romantic tradition every one. The lettering on one was blurred. She could not decipher it, and put out her hand instinctively to take the book from the shelf. The movement recalled him to her.

"Those are most of the books I read," he said. "Some of them were my father's, and I've added to them by degrees."

He sat down by her again, and they resumed, as though by tacit consent, the same position as before. But this time he took her hand in his, as though to establish a closer communion.

He plunged into the story of his marriage: a quixotic marriage founded, as she had earlier half-guessed, upon a dreaming misconception of the nature of women.

He had shown her no picture of his wife, but through his unconscious revelation of mistakes that had thrust them apart, she saw a woman's face hardening into the detachment, the self-refusal of all the portraits on the stair-case.

"But why must you always do everything for her? Why not treat her as an equal, share your mind with her, let her act *with* you?" she burst out at last.

"Because I don't want to," he confessed. "I want to be the one to make sacrifices. I love to think she's weak, and that I'm strong."

"How appallingly selfish," said Elizabeth.

"I know. I know that quite well," he conceded. "It's one of the bad things about me. And there are others. . . "

He talked rapidly now, at random, pausing now and then to say "You don't *mind* my telling you these things? I've never talked like this to anyone before."

"Of course I don't mind," said Elizabeth. "It's what I'm here for, isn't it?"

What she was there for defined itself more and more clearly in her mind as he went on. She had once watched the emancipation of a dragon-fly from an earlier stage of existence, as it clung to a reed above the level of the water from which it had emerged, and dragged itself from the outworn shell of its earlier self. Here, she could see it now, an escape of the same kind was to be attempted. Not simply from the house, as he had at first suggested, with the responsibilities it entailed, but from the self that had been formed by its traditions. A self that now seemed to him subaqueous, unfulfilled, out of touch with the realities of earth and air and sun.

At their chance encounter at the inn he had seen her as something that had escaped into freer air, and romantically, in some far more romantic parable, no doubt, than the one she had hit upon, he had staged in this planned re-counter the setting for a miracle. She was the reed.

A broken reed, mused Elizabeth sadly, as she listened, for she had no faith in miracles. She could not make over to him, simply, what greater freedom she had won for herself.

She listened intently as he tried to define himself, to see himself for the first time, as it were, detached from his native element and ready for escape. It would not do. He was still thinking in terms of his old existence, in the pattern handed down to him from the portraits on the stairs. Something deep within him condemned him to be the last of his race, rather

than, as he had dimly imagined himself, the first of a new generation.

She felt a pang of unreasoning remorse, as though in all these years she ought to have been aware of him, aware that he was prisoned, left behind.

"Why don't you read," she cried, reasoning with him, "other sorts of books; get into touch with different people? Our old world is crumbling, as you say, but there's a new one in the making for us to possess."

"It's *too* new. I can't face it," he said. "Not alone."

"One has to face most things alone," said Elizabeth, "but it's worth it."

He was silent. Leaning forward he stared into the embers, where a last little flame at that moment flickered and died out.

"If I had you . . ." he began.

"Surely we can be friends," said Elizabeth. "We can write. I can introduce you to people . . ."

He shook his head. "It wouldn't do. There's no place for you, even as a friend, in her scheme of things. She wouldn't understand . . . There's only to-night . . . To-night is mine. . ."

"To-night is mine," thought Elizabeth, with a sudden rush of happiness, though at the same instant she knew the happiness for what it was—a shred of an unlived past, to be lost as soon as recovered. The tenderness, kindling to passion, that she felt for the man beside her, belonged to a meeting that might have happened, but did not, years ago.

A little clock somewhere in the room chimed a late hour. The embers on the hearth fell apart, turned rapidly grey, and Elizabeth stared at them as though by the intentness of her look she could keep them alive.

"You don't like me a bit," he said in a changed, harsh voice.

"But I *do*."

"Really? Do you mean that?" he whispered, dragging her close, looking deep into her eyes.

Waking next morning they lay for a time in the candle-glow that tinged the bedposts and the patterned canopy above them, talking softly. They might have been friends and lovers for a lifetime, the tenderness and passion of the night merging in one their past, separate existences. They talked in low, contented voices, bartering confidences at random, building up a fragile world that should enclose them; and within the radius of the candle-light time for a little while stood still. But at the window a thin blade of daylight edged in under the blind, creeping towards them, bringing a different day.

Elizabeth was dressing when a double knocked resounded at the back door, and for a moment, to her confusion, she was swept by a sense of guilt. It faded, but the spell was broken.

"The post has come," he told her, when he had called her in to breakfast. "The poor old chap could hardly get here for the snow." His voice had a tinge of anxiety. "It will be worse than yesterday, doing the two journeys in the time. I've got to be back here to meet the seven o'clock train."

"Put *me* into a train at the nearest station," said Elizabeth. "That would save all the trouble."

He shook his head. "No. I brought you down and I'm taking you back. But we shall have to hurry."

They had risen early. In a short time they had put the place in order, banking up the fires as yesterday. But on the mantelpiece in the sitting-room two letters stood waiting. "Mrs Staffield. Mrs Staffield." The whole room stood waiting. It had an alien, unfriendly look.

He brought the car round to the door.

"The snow has covered all our tracks of yesterday," he said.

"It will soon have covered to-day's," said Elizabeth, watching the snow sift into her latest footprint.

The body of the house was invisible from where she stood, masked by a shrubbery planned to conceal the kitchen entrance. But from the angle of the drive she saw the steps mounting under the snow to the great porch, like a wave against a cliff. Then the trees of the gateway shut everything out; and with a shock of sadness she felt her youth fade from her a second time, more definitely and irreparably than it had done by the slow passing of ordinary years.

A long level road lay before them, with obliterated hedges, under a leaden sky and the persistent, dizzying, sifting veil of snow.

The conversation lagged. Having no plans, they had too much and yet too little to talk about. The play was over; the curtain should have been rung down. The weight of the hours in front of her drove at Elizabeth's breast with the weight of years, as though in this interval before taking up her life again she must re-live all the years from her youth till now. She must re-endure the crash, the plunge into the world unripe, unready; the blundering search for some foothold, some steadying purpose; and then her late marriage and early widowhood, and the blanker loneliness that had ensued. It all pressed against her with a physical pain, as though the walls of a tunnel were falling in upon her. And at the end of the tunnel there was nothing. Her friends, her work seemed nothing now beside the happiness of a few hours since, that was fading in her hands like a dying ember. She watched it fade. She could have blown it into life again, perhaps, by showing him her thoughts, appealing to his pity. Piteousness, the romantic aspect of it, would have been her trump card. But she tossed it aside. Pity, she saw, should rather be for him, since she had not helped him, since, in the stream that was

tearing them apart again, she would keep her head above water and he perhaps would drown.

He sat beside her at the wheel, brooding, and suddenly exclaimed "It's too bad. Your fire will be out. The place will be wretchedly cold. I shall hate to leave you like that."

"Oh, that's all right," said Elizabeth cheerfully. "I'm so used to it. I shall have a good fire going in no time."

She made herself numb to the pressure of the pain, freed herself enough to start a discussion. But their minds were not in tune; they were soon on the verge of a quarrel, and she had to laugh it off. She turned the subject, felt silence growing on them again, and resigned herself to it and to the blankness ahead.

The tentacles of London came straggling out through the snow, the houses standing up in rows like the suckers of an octopus. Far away at the centre was a dingy mass. Through the tortuous by-ways they came to Elizabeth's street, empty and blanketted with snow.

The staircase had a cavernous, damp smell, that seemed to have crept into the flat.

As they embraced in the dusk of the little hall, "Perhaps we shall meet again after all," he said, but neither of them believed it.

She heard his footsteps dwindling down the long stair-case, and the tremor of the house ran through her with the closing of the street door. Then, faint and final, the car door slammed, and the motor, with a little gasp, like a creature wakened from a dream, churred softly away into the silence.

Black Dog

R. N. Currey

It was a short step from discovering that Wentworth Jackson, the proprietor of the Kola-kola business, spied on his workmen in the form of a black dog, to realizing that he was responsible for the prolonged lack of rain.

Certainly he, though a pure black of no education, had profited from the drought. His fifteen barrows, threading their way through the streets like ice-cream tricycles—except that they bore such mottoes as "Jehovah Our Defence" and "Moses, the War Dog"—increased to twenty at this time. Previously they had kept to the shabby one-storey rows of the negro and coloured parts of Clintonville, but now they ventured among the white, palm-lined section that models itself on Miami and consumes its cold drinks in drug-stores.

The fourteen-year-old black boy, Kenneth Grant, was sent with a coloured man called José Diaz into Victoria Street, where the Post Office, a bank, and a couple of large stores are. Through the heat of the day Kenneth pushed the newly-painted barrow—obscurely labelled "Done Beholding"—up and down the glaring white street-edge. Chauffeurs, carters, errand-boys, and even lesser clerks exchanged coins for the many-coloured liquids (of which kola was only one) ranged in bottles along the barrow. Kenneth, who had only been taken

on that morning, was impressed, and disposed to think well of his boss.

"Went Jackson sho' knows how to make de money!" he commented.

José, who had been calculating how much more commission he would have been making in a cheaper street, snarled.

"He knows how to squeeze out his grape-fruit!'" he said. "Yo' wait till we get back to-night, Kennet bo'!"

That night, when a half asleep Kenneth went up with José to hand in the takings, Wentworth Jackson turned on him with an unnecessary display of bad teeth.

"Kennet Grant, yo' new bo'. Gir over to de fac'ry to fill up de bottles an' load de barrows fo' to-morrow! Gir along!"

The factory stood next to Wentworth Jackson's house on the edge of the Minta Gully, a bone-dry watercourse that became a raging torrent every three years or so, and had once in living memory washed away the entire suburb-village of Sarah's End. It was a low, corrugated-iron erection protected by the trees of the gully from the life-giving evening breeze off the sea. In the "yard" outside the factory door stood the empty barrows. A long fire at the far end, over which cauldron-like pots of syrupy liquid swung, filled the place with a glare that reminded Kenneth of Evangelist Armstrong's week-by-week pictures of hell.

The heat was unspeakable. The flames shone on the naked sweating torsos of the three men who mixed and cooked the liquids, as they moved very slowly between the fire and the tables. Except that the figures moved slowly, thought Kenneth, as he filled bottles at a row of large (ex-beer) barrels, he would be sure that he had died suddenly and gone there. Only when one of them lolled back against a wall and another sat down on a table was he reassured.

He filled the bottles, one green, two red, one purple, two

yellow, and carried them to the door. Suddenly there was a step outside, and the figures were galvanized into tortured movement. Kenneth, a bottle in each hand, nearly screamed when one of them turned furtively towards the door and began to laugh.

"It's jest a darg, bo's! Jest a darg! Yo' sho' did skeer us peerin' in like boss Jackson, darg! Gir along!"

He threw a lump of charred wood good-humouredly into the doorway. The black dog that was slinking through in the shadow of the wall leapt quickly sideways and made off.

The men began to slack again. All were sitting or lolling now, laughing or cursing according to the degree of their exhaustion. There was a general feeling of relief that it had only been a dog instead of Wentworth Jackson, but to Kenneth the long, completely black body, the thin legs, the eyes that glowed strangely in the pointed face, seemed of a piece with the hot shed filled with the torturing flames.

Working like a slow automaton, he filled the bottles and set them round the barrows. One green, two red, one purple, two yellow—they glinted in the firelight as he carried them across to the door. Thirteen barrows. Fourteen.

Then, suddenly, the figures about the fire were lashed into feverish activity again.

By the time Wentworth Jackson was round the door, they were working at full tilt, but he came right over to them. Big and fierce in the light of the fire, he stood over them and began to shout. "You t'iefin' scoundrels, slackerin' off when my back turned away! You t'iefin' mongoose——"

The firelight shone on his foul teeth, as he became rapidly incoherent. He seemed to Kenneth as fluent as the Evangelist Armstrong. The men shrivelled before him.

Then, for no comprehensible reason, he seized the man who had thrown the stick at the dog, and began to shake him.

"Yo' t'iefin' mongoose, John Jeffries! Yo' t'iefin' John Crow! Yo' the wors' slacker ob dem all! Yo' de leader in vice! Nex' time, John Jefferies, I t'row you out!"

He threw the man heavily against the table as he went out. Jefferies, a little out of breath, picked himself up carefully, asking in tones of astonishment:

"Fo' why was he craas jest on me? Ah'd sho' like to murder dat ol' debbil!"

Next morning, over his breakfast of corn-meal, Kenneth outlined the events of the night before to his mother. Mary Grant had a reputation for "praphecy" that was valid not only in her own village, but in her own family.

"An' I sho' was skeered o' de black darg!" concluded Kenneth.

"Yo' did right to be skeered, Kennett bo'! Dat darg ain't a darg at all ——"

Kenneth stared up at his mother.

"Dat darg ain't a darg at all," she pursued. "Dat darg's Went Jackson, pearin' roun' to see who ain't woikin'. It made him mad when Jefferies t'rew a stick at him."

She fell silent then, sitting back in a semi-trance that she apparently judged to be enough for private utterances. Kenneth, hurriedly finishing his corn-meal, rushed off to the factory to spread his mother's "praphecy" that the black dog was Went Jackson.

José, who prided himself on his freedom from negro superstitions, pooh-poohed the idea.

"It don' make sense," he objected. "A man cyan' be a darg."

"Ah s'picion de praphetess right," said one of the negroes who had been at the factory the night before. "Or fo' why was Went Jackson so craas on Jeffries?"

"Sho' dat's what ah say las' night," agreed Jefferies. "Fo'

why was he done craas on me? Ah'd sho' like to murder dat debbil!"

"Well," said a man who had not yet spoken. "Yo' got yo' chance. Jes' wait till de darg come back to-night, and kill him wid yo' machete. Dat'll make Went Jackson wake up in de marnin' wid his t'roat cut across!"

"Dat'll sho' learn him not to come peerin' roun'!" laughed somebody else, but Jefferies stood back at this.

"Dey'd sho' say ah'd done it. Ah'd sho' swing for it!"

"Dey cyan' prison yo' for killing a darg from up de gully!" sneered José. "Ah stay behind to-night, and ah kill him fo' you!"

When the dog came that night a rather less assured José was waiting for it behind the door with a machete. Kenneth, filling a bottle twenty feet away, saw him hit out hard at the low slinking head. The dog leapt swiftly as the blade flashed out of the dark, and yelped shrilly as it caught its right fore-paw. It ran off on three legs, crying pitifully, and leaving a trickle of blood.

José, frightened now, squatted shivering by the door with the machete in his hand. He made no attempt to go after the dog, and nobody tried to persuade him.

Then, next day, which was Sunday, came the sensation.

There were clouds in the sky, signs that a break in the drought was just possible. Evangelist Armstrong was going to pray for rain. If prayer had been good policy in the completely uncompromising weeks preceding, it would be stupid to neglect it when the gods seemed to be hesitating. The little stone church was packed. There was not yet an actual shortage of water to drink, but the pastures were dry and the cattle ill for want of greenstuff. Among the children and even some of the grown-ups an epidemic of suppurating sores on the hands and feet had broken out.

As Wentworth Jackson came in, after the bell had started to ring, the black and brown faces turned inquiringly towards him, then became open-mouthed and open-eyed in astonishment and horror.

Wentworth Jackson's right hand was bandaged!

Throughout the service, the congregation, who had all heard the story of the black dog by now, stared at him. Although the rough benches that served as pews were packed, Wentworth Jackson sat with a clear space to either side of him, while those in the rows immediately in front and behind appeared to lean away from him. Evangelist Armstrong, who had come into the pulpit gratified by the size of his congregation, soon began to feel that hymns, lessons, and prayers were not getting the attention they deserved. He could not know that even his fervent prayer that the rain might at last come was academic compared with some of the primitive emotions stirring in the breasts of those about him.

It seemed a matter of course that the white-clad congregation, reinforced by Sunday loungers in torn khaki, should collect in Mary Grant's "yard" as soon as the service was over, and Mary Grant had not held her position as "praphetess" since little more than a girl without knowing how to deal with them.

She gave them time, first, to exchange the latest bulletins. Wentworth Jackson had complained to somebody who could not avoid speaking to him that he had got a drought-sore on his hand—a chile sho' wouldn' believe that! And he was going to bed now because his hand was all inflamed—well, we'd better keep our eyes skinned fo' the lil' black darg!

She came on to the tiny verandah then, and sitting back in her rocking-chair, closed her eyes. The crowd stopped chattering to watch her.

"Send us rain, Lawd," she gabbled. "Send us rain fo' . . .

cows, fo' de hens . . . . guinea grass . . . dis fruitful earth. Send us rain, Lawd! Send us rain!"

As she went on her sentences became clearer and more staccato. The crowd hung on her words.

"A debbil is holdin' back de good Lawd's rain!" she announced. "A debbil who make his money from de thirst of de Lawd's people. . . . A debbil who peers in on his workmen in de shape of a 'bombination of sin . . . . in de shape of a black darg!

"De black darg am wounded in de right-hand front paw. Kill de black darg! Kill de black darg dead! Hallelujah! Praise de Redeemer! Kill de debbil who hold back de good Lawd's rain!"

As she spoke her eyes rolled slowly backwards. She lay back in the chair now with only the whites exposed. As she spoke she pointed at a growing white cloud with a perceptible fringe of black.

"Kill de debbil now," she urged, "befo' he use de water to quench de fires of hell. Kill de black darg now! Search up de gully now fo' de black darg!"

The mixed crowd of worshippers and loungers turned shouting, and set off at a half-run for the gully. Kenneth, running beside, saw José and Jefferies at their head.

A shout proclaimed the discovery of the trail of dried blood. It led through a barbed wire fence and down into the bone-dry gully. The dog had evidently bled badly. The brown drops could easily be followed at a run over the stones. The crowd, blood-thirsty now, slithered sweating along the dried watercourse. If the leaders had lost the trail they would have swept forward and blotted it out, but José, with the expression on his face of a man fighting for his life, followed it as a hound follows the trail of a fox.

They had gone about half a mile when José suddenly

shouted, an unorthodox view-haloo which did not fail to stir their hunter's blood. A hundred yards ahead, where the tunnel of trees closed over the gully, a black dog, walking uncertainly on three legs, appeared from among some low bushes, and seeing the hunt coming towards it, began to run weakly up the gully.

The hunt became cunning. It stopped. Called coaxingly. Whistled. But the half-wild creature was terrified. It looked round once and then scuffled on. The pursuit began to lengthen out, the young and lean pulling ahead. To Kenneth, struggling to keep up with José and Jefferies, the shouting, the scuffling on the stones, everything about the chase was exhilarating.

The black dog struggled hard to keep its lead. It took another mile of hard running before the leaders began to close in on it. The trees grew thick over the gully here, but they were near enough to see it in the half-light, stumbling pitifully over the rough ground. When at last José, Jefferies, and one or two others cornered it against the steep bank, it turned savagely on José and bit deep into his arm before Jefferies managed to get it over the head with his machete.

The kill was marked by loud cries from those who, like Kenneth, were immediately behind José and Jefferies, but as the rest straggled up to look at the hacked-up, skinny corpse, half-eaten already by mange and ticks, a strained silence fell.

Then someone, looking up through a gap in the roof of trees, cried out in a voice full of awe:

"Look at de clouds, bo's! It's gonna rain! It's gonna rain! We sho' hab killed de debbil dat hold back de good Lawd's rain!"

There was a chorus of "Amen!" and "Hallelujah!" as the crowd began to remember that it was, after all, on a holy mission, but a practical voice cut in:

"We better get out o' de gully den, or we all be washed away!"

As the last of them scrambled out on to the rough sloping grassland above, the sky opened.

Lightning, thunder and sheet rain seemed to strike the earth simultaneously. In the first instant white Sunday clothes and brown disreputable ones were reduced to drenched rags clinging to black and brown bodies. The workers of the Lord's will, overwhelmed now with the magnitude of their blessing, struggled head-down against the massive downpour. Every person there had at some time seen the gully fill to the brim in a few minutes. Some remembered the time when its flood devastated the countryside. They pressed against the solid wall of water to get as far away from the gully as possible.

As they pushed, holding hands in groups of three or four, towards the rough road down to Sarah's End, every groove or hollow became a stream of water. The road, when they reached it, was a knee-deep torrent. Nobody could get home through a mile and a half of that. They struggled back from it to find a thin sheet of water spreading over the baked impermeable fields. At intervals the lightning flashed like smudged lurid gold behind the rain, and the thunder crashed across the exposed hillside. They had all known lightning and thunder as bad as this, but it had never come to them, as to-day, under a deep sea of rain.

Some climbed into trees, less afraid of the dancing lightning than of the omnipresent water. Others, including Kenneth, José, and Jefferies, reached Sarah's End, soon after the rain stopped, over fenced properties that were only ankle-deep. From Mary Grant's verandah they watched the flood sweep over the edge of the gully, and tug away Wentworth Jackson's house as if it had been one of his own rotten teeth. The

crumpled wooden walls swung downstream with a quaint following of highly-coloured barrows.

"De Evangelist was reskin' himself to craas to de house an' warn Went Jackson," observed the phophetess, "but ah tol' him Went Jackson was up de gully. Blessed be de name of de Lawd!"

Blessed Virgin

F. M. Dunn

At seventeen, Clare Lysaght was pronounced brilliant. Her English mistress was delighted to find a pupil whose mind so readily leapt to the finer points of literary style. She was encouraged to fly as high as her wings would take her. The finely disciplined brains of older and less brilliant women were behind her, and when she became senior scholar at one of the Oxford women's colleges, it was a personal triumph for her teachers. A faded little woman in a drab high school staff room glowed all over when the news came through. Had she not given of her best for this clever girl, drawing out of herself the last and purest drops of knowledge, that fine fluid of a personality which the best teacher will give to the best pupil, and which makes a union between them as exalted as it is transitory? The teacher shows, the pupil sees, and suddenly something mystical has occurred, a boundless joy and light in the brain of each, a blessed sharing of it. Yet a wise teacher is not made sad by the knowledge that a wise pupil forgets the source.

Clare was very beautiful, but her beauty was hidden by the bright flame of her brain, as a flower might be hidden which was placed directly behind a bright light. It was obscured by what might have illumined it.

She was tall and thin with dark brown hair, and large eyes almost black were deeply set under fine brows. Her face was pale and pointed, and her mouth and chin quivered delicately with the lightest thought, as the wind sends ripples over water. But she was round shouldered, and her lovely hands and feet slid uncertainly into awkward postures. Nature, in a mood of caprice, had created beauty, and then, as it were, disgraced it.

The four years that Clare spent at Oxford passed like a chime of bells. She reached her twenty-first year with a clear and tempered perception of many minds and an insight into rich, bounding lives that she was able to express to perfection. Yet of herself she had no knowledge, and the more she introspected the less she learnt.

Professor Gedge, a recognized authority on Milton, was astounded by an essay she offered him. She almost convinced him that *Samson Agonistes* was a finer piece of work than *Paradise Lost*. His hand moved to his own well-thumbed, neatly annotated copy of Milton's works. His face lit up as he re-read the familiar lines. She made him doubt and wonder. Was there perhaps feeling and passion here that he himself had missed, a homely turn of phrase in the Samson that for pure poetry outshone all the meteoric blaze of the greater work?

"Anyway," he thought, "whether one altogether agrees with her or not, Miss Lysaght's work is extremely good." He was nearing sixty, and was dried up as a bit of shrivelled leather, but that day he noticed the delightful warmth of the afternoon sun as it fell gently on his valuable old rugs. He bent down and touched an inch of brilliant blue in a pool of wine-red. "That's a lovely bit of colour," he said to himself.

Philip Lake was also a professor, but he was by no means old or dried up. He was thirty-five, and he tutored Clare for

a term. He revolted against all things academic, and sought always warmth and a certain raciness in his pleasures; but in literture his passion was for the metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century, John Donne in particular. It was rarely that he found a student who honestly appreciated Donne, and still more rarely a woman, but Clare delighted him. Far from being baulked by his crabbed exterior, she seemed to leap at Donne, just like he did himself. She liked the bits he liked; and above all, she got at the man himself, she really grasped the amazing paradox of sensualism and mysticism colouring all his work. Together they pulled him to pieces. They were like two puppies at an old mat. At the end of the hour they faced each other exhausted. He pushed back a lock of hair that had fallen over his forehead. She was flushed and bright-eyed, as she sat upright in his leather arm-chair, her slim legs sprawling ungracefully. He thought of her suddenly as a desirable woman; he wanted to touch her, but she was busy with her papers; she was thinking only of Donne. He opened the door for her as she left his room.

Several times she moved him thus, always after they had shared some enthusiasm, and always she was remote, still preoccupied with the subject.

"I wonder what she thinks of me," he thought. "I wonder if she knows that I'd like to sleep with her."

He was almost certain that she would be inaccessible except by way of marriage, and that spurred his interest in her. It seemed to him curious that a girl who so grasped the personality of John Donne should not herself be aware of the freakish side of this passion called love. Most certainly, her mind was Elizabethan in vitality, why then did her body linger with the squealing romantics? He found himself often thinking of her, and he looked forward to the hour he spent with her every week. Her understanding delighted him, and

sometimes the thought of marriage with her suggested itself to him. He played with it in a balanced, half-amused manner, as though it were someone else's problem.

"But would she love me?" he thought. "Could I ever make her love me?"

That to Philip Lake was essential.

He was a darkish, slightly built man, of no great presence, and no particular charm, except perhaps a certain unself-consciousness which sprang from a complete absorption in his subject. The great passion of his life was English Literature. He accepted the fact and always offered to it, in great humility, the gift of a brightly burnished mind. He was well aware that on certain subjects no one living could speak with greater authority than himself. His work was well-recognized, but this never disturbed his equable poise.

"I am a professor," he said to himself, "and soon I shall be an old professor. God help me if I'm ever an old bore. Literature is the reflection of life, and if I am to understand it, I must also live."

Therefore, he never attempted to dam up within himself the sources of his own life. He opened himself to outer influences, and lived, loved, and enjoyed himself in surroundings where one would not expect to find a University professor. Yet, he was withal a gentle, unassuming young man, and not by any means that sort who would grab at a coarse pleasure by way of contrast to over-refinement. He was reasonable in all things, and his life and his work were all of one piece.

"I want a woman who will love me," he again said to himself, "even if it's only a matter of pure technique." In the course of his life, he had deliberately sought love that he felt would be technically perfect, and he found it a very pure pleasure—until it bored him, and then he usually found that

the women who were experienced in giving their love were also accomplished in the art of effacement.

On the other hand, he groped for the sharer of his life, someone who knew as well as he did himself the almost miraculous scope of the English tongue when a master used it.

"I wonder if it's really possible to find the two things," he thought. And with a smile, "After all what I really want is a brilliant creature, who will think me so much more brilliant that she is willing to produce my dinner and sew on my trouser buttons. Her brain must equal my brain, but my brain is the more important, a conceited thought, but luckily for us both, a biological law. Or is it a mad dream? I don't want a woman one whit my inferior, and yet she must love me enough to let me rule her. Love me. Love me." He repeated the words to himself, thinking tenderly of Clare. He wanted to lay his head on her knees and feel her hands touching him and holding him. How wonderful that he should feel such a yielding of himself, and at the same moment hold the power to bend her, retain his original male force. "Only love," he thought, "can do this, bought or given."

But the next time she came to him to be coached she was just as piercing in her vision and clean-cut in her expression of it, but her eyes were blind to him, and her body moved like a man mumbling in sleep. "Dear child," thought Philip. "How can I marry you?—and I desperately want to."

He thought of other scholars of his acquaintance who had married clever young girls, and what had become of their lives together. The man becomes more commonplace as the woman becomes more eccentric. There is no happy home life; they glare at each other across ever widening savannahs of self-centered misery.

Because she doesn't love him she destroys his mind, and because he can't make her he destroys the woman in her and

brings out a queer, half-daft monster. It was an ugly picture, but so often in a university town one caught glimpses of bowed and dull-eyed men in grubby waistcoats, hurrying to or from lectures that few attended and most slept through. So often, at home, there was a wild woman wearing clothes out of the Arabian Nights, who lived with ghosts, and battled perpetually with the phantoms of her own mind, instead of quietly tending what came to her hand.

Again Philip thought of Clare.

"I'd like to see her with those lovely arms of hers in a tub of soap-suds. I don't know why. Heaven knows I should hate to see her broken with monotonous rough work. Oh! Clare, love me!" he cried. "Be lovable." He had a wild thought of taking her up into the woods, and setting her under a crab-apple tree, where the blossom would drop gently on her dark head. And he himself would come close to her and read poetry till they were both so drunk with it that they fell into each other's arms and were unbelievably happy.

Then he remembered that it was the Trinity term, and the blossom would all be over; and apart from that it would be wrong to kiss a sleeping beauty unless he was quite certain that it would wake her up, otherwise he might only disturb her dreams. So he did nothing.

Twice more did she come to him, and then the University year ended and she went down for good. They never met again.

Clare became a teacher. Her family was not very well-off, and it was taken for granted that a University education would enable her to earn her own living. Nothing but teaching presented itself. It did not occur to Clare that with her beauty and her brains the world might very well lay itself at her feet had she the wits to wait for it. As it was, she scanned the columns of *The Times Educational Supplement*,

and held in readiness the typed copies of her excellent testimonials.

She found herself, presently, in a large suburban high school, and for seven long years she laboured therein.

Almost unrespitedly she hated it, yet because she, too, had a real passion for English Literature, she taught it well. Dull girls brightened a little, and expressed their shy thoughts a little less awkwardly. Clever ones forged ahead. Day by day, her brain functioned with the same brilliant precision, though all her body was filled with a dull unlocalized ache. Shivering, she scuttled down draughty corridors with a pile of books under her arm. Hugging her jersey closely round her thin body, she began her lesson. The girls kept quiet for her because they wanted Miss Lysaght to read poetry to them with that divine voice of hers. She grew sick and tired of the smell of ink and exercise books, and class-rooms stuffy with the odour of lively bodies. She hated the harsh tones of an uncultured voice, and the lisped suburbanisms. Subconsciously, she heard a thousand maulings of the English tongue. She hated the bell that eternally dragged her to work.

Every summer holiday she took her mother to a different seaside resort. Every year they stayed at a different boarding-house, but there was always the same glittering candelabra above the dining-room table, and the same plush-covered sofa in the drawing-room.

Over and over again, Clare asked herself: "Shall I never have a home of my own? Must I go on teaching other people's children for ever, and go on spending these empty, empty, holidays?"

At the end of them, she longed anew for her busy days. She now definitely wanted marriage. "To put it bluntly," she thought, "I suppose I want a man. But I want, I want——" She stopped, and her chin quivered as always with a sudden

flash of thought. "I want to scrub and cook and wash for a man—a house of my own, and children. Other people have it, why shouldn't I?" There was something puzzled and hurt about her face, and at the same time, a new determination in the set of her mouth, a belated adventurousness.

The following August something occurred which the gods might call a miracle, and the world a piece of peculiar folly. At all events, it was sufficiently unusual to call forth a good deal of comment.

Mrs. Lysaght and Clare were spending August at the little fishing village of Blakenham. Clare had protested against the eternal round of Cleethorpes, Southwold, and Bournemouth, and had persuaded her mother to try for a change one of the comparatively unexploited east coast villages. They were lodging in an old smugglers' cottage, with an excessively low ceiling to the bedroom, and a warm musty smell to the sheets. Clare liked it, but her mother sat indoors and knitted with a martyrish air. Unfortunately it had rained for a week, and there was no place of entertainment. Vainly her daughter plied her with magazines and begged the landlady to let them have the use of her decrepit wireless set.

"I've done all the crosswords, dear, except this one," said Mrs. Lysaght. "What word is there of seven letters, the second x, that means 'to take advantage of'?"

"'Exploit'," suggested Clare.

"Oh, thank you, dear."

"I'm going out now, Mother, do you mind?"

"What? In the rain? Oh, no, not if you like it."

Two days later, the sun shone, and the scene was very charming. The place had once been an important harbour for grain. An arm of the sea, deeply silted up, filled and emptied itself with the rise and fall of the tide. A cobbled street came down to meet it, and all round the harbour, low, tiled barns

of a warm red brick, stood up against the blue sky. There was a green mound with a tree on it leaning against a bit of broken wall. Farther away still, a group of noble-looking chestnuts moved in the wind, and if you turned and looked out in the other direction mud-flats and sea-lavender stretched as far as the eye could see. There was a golden glint of sand-hills in the distance, and on the right a sea-wall wound itself like a thin serpent, far out to the coast-guard station. Again on the right, it was bounded by marsh and marram grass, which an enterprising landowner had tried to turn into golf links. Tern and gull swept inland with a flash of silver wings.

Sam Lawson had just beached his boat. He had had to hurry to get in on the tide, but the fishing was good and he had left it a bit late. Now he was sitting on an upturned lobster pot, and smoking a cigarette. His old cloth trousers were rusty with age and sea water, and his rubber thigh-boots slopped down below his knees, the straps hanging. It had been a hot day and his blue shirt was open to the waist, sleeves rolled up over his muscular forearms. Face, neck, chest, and arms were tanned to rich shades of brown and pink. His thick hair was the authentic chestnut-gold, and his eyes, blue as a Scandinavian's, looked out shrewdly on to the world. Six foot one, he was a regular Viking of a man, and a great fellow with the girls.

Clare often walked down to the quay to watch the boats come in. Like many quiet people of the English race, she was fascinated by the craft of the sea. She passed Sam, where he sat lazily smoking. He looked up and recognized her for a visitor—a "toff", and he always made a point of politely greeting such of these as came his way. One never knew when a cheery "Good morning, sir," might not mean a bit of business, a sea trip in his boat at an outrageous price, a bunch of crabs taken at twice their value. He had acumen

enough to realize that a townsman would always open his purse for what smacked of genuine salt from the sea. It was even more important to be respectful to the ladies. By nature, Sam found the latter easy to approach. He often overheard an admiring remark. "A genuine Norse type. A real Viking." He carried his shoulders a trifle more proudly, swaggered a little to his friends, and showed his patrons a respectful, but confident mien. He was no socialist, but he credited ladies and gentlemen with having the same emotions as himself. He had a natural uncringing interest in them, particularly ladies. His splendid physique was a passport to a mild success, not that he had hitherto enjoyed with any the kind of intimate relationship that one might have with a girl of the village, but vaguely, at the back of his proud mind, there lingered an unsatisfied curiosity. So might the barbarian have been curious as he looked on the unattainable Athenian dames.

"Nice afternoon for a walk," he said, looking up as Clare approached him. She glanced at him, as he sat sprawling there, with the sun shining on his face. She had seen him before and noticed his good looks. She paused and looked at his boat as it lay on its side on the shingle.

"Very," she said, "but I'd sooner go out for a sail in that boat of yours." It was the slightest of tributes to something rather magnificent; in the depths of her being Clare knew that it was a deliberate advance. He grinned, showing tobacco-stained teeth.

"You can do that."

"But the tide's right out."

"It won't be out to-morrow."

"I should love to. What do you charge?" The chilly question dropped from her lips, but an inflexion betrayed it. Sam did not stir from his easy posture, but fixed her with his eyes. Sunlight capered across their icy blueness.

"Nothing—to you," he said. She laughed nervously.

"Oh! I couldn't think of it. I must pay."

His glance slid down her admiringly, there was a second's pause.

"Just for half an hour to-morrow afternoon? That wouldn't cost you anything, nor me." There was now a teasing admiration in his looks. She was frightened a little and strangely happy. Her great dark eyes met his and she ventured forth boldly.

"I should love to come, if you're sure—it won't be too much trouble, and waste your time." He was astounded at this instantaneous success, uncertain how to take it, with a possessive roughness or the respect due to one of the "toffs". He decided on the latter, with slight modifications.

"The tide'll be right about three to-morrow; if you care to come, I shall be very pleased to take you." It was a very happy remark, conveying as it did, equality, respect, and a certain royal condescension, a really amazing subtle achievement for an illiterate fisherman.

"I'll be there," she said, walking on. His eyes smiled her farewell, and he placed the stub of his cigarette between his lips again. In another ten minutes, he rose and strode off to his tea.

Sam took Clare out in his boat, not once but several times. He never quite knew how he stood with her, an entirely new experience for him, accustomed as he was to conquests preluded by a certain by-play of backing and advancing. It piqued him into repeating it.

"Will you come again to-morrow?" he asked her shyly.

"If you'll take me." She did not offer to pay again, and she did not treat him as her employee, but on the other hand, she did not challenge him by look or word to amorous battle. *That* he understood and was well versed in. She simply sat

in his boat and seemed interested in all he told her. She noticed the different birds and asked him questions about them, and he showed her how they laid their eggs in a hollow on the sand without building any nest. He explained how they caught whitebait for their young, and if, through bad weather, the fish was scarce, all the first hatch died. He showed her a mirage on the water beyond the point of the estuary. It only appeared, he said, with the north-east wind, never at any other time. He showed her his fishing tackle and the virtues of his little boat. She was quiet and intelligent, and he began to feel for her a sort of grateful tenderness. Custom said "Be respectful." His fine body, and his sound common sense, cried to him, "Be her master," and between the two of them, his manner to her had a subtle charm that a more sophisticated lover might have envied and a less susceptible woman found enchanting.

The third time he took her out she wanted to stop to pick some sea-lavender, and they moored the boat to a post far out on a deserted headland. As Clare jumped ashore, she slipped a little on the mud flat and brushed against Sam's arm. He turned sharply, and gathering her to him, kissed her awkwardly, and then stepped back, both hands hanging by his sides. Defiantly, he looked to see what sort of a mess he'd made of things. She, too, was standing there limply, her cotton frock blowing in the wind against her slim thighs and pointed breasts. She came a step towards him, and without speaking drew her hand down the length of his arm with a long stroking movement. She was gentle and very still. Again, he kissed her, but this time with more accomplishment. She lay in his arms like a young sea-bird, one of the half-fledged youngsters that his great hands often plucked out of the nest. He would caress it softly and put it back again. Slowly he let her go till he held only her wrists.

"You'll marry me, Clare?" he said. Only the ghost of a question was in the statement. She nodded without speaking. Then her mouth quivered a little as with the shadow of amusement.

"How did you know my name?" she asked him. He bent down and tightened a rope, then rising to his full height, looked down at her and grinned.

"It don't take me long to find out the name of any girl I take out."

Because, for once, he was deeply shaken in his emotions, he fought hard to retain his composure. "An even keel," he thought to himself. It was the nearest he got to self-analysis. He wanted to move away and absorb into himself this astounding thing, get it firmly in his grip, and yet to be aware of its demands, in the same way as his brown hands held the sheet of his boat, the fine muscles of fingers and wrists in action, the knuckles gleaming white. Yet at the same time, he wanted to come closer to her. Actually, he remembered the trifling purpose they had come for, and with hasty swooping movements, gathered up a straggling bunch of sea-lavender. In his impatience, he dragged it up in long untidy tufts. He held the flowers out to her. "Is that enough for you?" he asked her nonchalantly. Supposing this was not true, and that he had just imagined it, it was as well to keep a sort of buoyancy in their relationship, like a cork bobbing up and down on awkward waters. It safeguarded something, he knew not what.

As in a dream, she took them from him.

"Oh! quite enough, thank you," she said.

"I think we might as well get off, then." He hesitated a few seconds, looking down at his boat, and then he turned and looked fully at her. He came forward to her and kissed her and held her to him in a rough imperious manner. Let

her just see what sort of stuff he was made of ! There were half a dozen girls he knew who liked that sort of thing—fair lapped it up! She returned his kisses with willing passion, yet he was half aware that he had not wholly conquered her, hence his puzzlement. She had sap in her like a fine twig. Potentially, she blossomed, yet actually at this moment, she seemed to be knocking against him with a gentle movement, like the upper branches of a fig-tree on his mother's house used to knock against his bedroom window in the winter nights.

As the wind filled out the sail of his boat and the white spray leapt at her bows, calmness came to him, and Clare too began to lose the unearthliness that had momentarily struck her. In a level manner, they discussed the prospect of their marriage. It was as though they had both agreed to accept a destiny that could not possibly be refused. Their blithe yielding to the will of the gods gave them both an added assurance that carried them gaily through mundanities. They were out of the nets of right and wrong and were swimming freely on a flowing tide.

Mrs. Lysaght was horrified, and loudly she bewailed.

"Clare, darling, you can't go and marry a common fisherman. You wouldn't go and give up your school work and what you're earning just to go and look after that man's house. The work'll kill you, and you'll be miserable just living in a wretched little cottage. Do think again, dear. I wish we'd never come here for the holidays. I never wanted to; there's nothing nice about the place. Tell him you've changed your mind, and find you can't go through with it after all. He'll understand right enough; he knows you're not his sort. Go on, Clare. Then we'll go right away to-morrow. Nobody will ever know anything about it."

Vainly she pressed her urging. Clare was placidly adamant.

It is doubtful if her mother's words reached her full consciousness. She walked in a dream, her eyes wide open, like two circles of dark velvet in a pale setting. Her forehead was white like a high moon, and when Sam was with her, the colour came and went faintly in her cheeks.

As for Sam Lawson himself, he was not unlike one of the great barns that stood on the quay. He was well and simply architected, a man of solid brick, and like them, the sun burnished him with a red-gold splendour.

Clare gave notice to give up her post at Christmas. Sam knew of a cottage they would be able to have, and they were going to be married quietly at the New Year.

As a village Lothario, Sam had a full share of teasing. For the most part, his friends considered him to be a mad devil that had bitten off more than he could chew this time.

"School-teacher, ain't she, Sam?"

"Mind she don't larn you more'n you bargained for."

"The old lady looks a sharp 'un."

"Mind she don't find out about Elsie and Gladys that day at the Yarmouth races."

Sam took all this chaff good-humouredly, and pursued his way. He was no more vicious than a well-grown stallion, but what odd miscalculation on the part of fate had thrown in his lot with this sheath-like woman? The brain in her body was like a sword rattling in its scabbard.

Mrs. Lysaght spoke of the matter to her only relation, a brother home from tea-planting in Ceylon. He took a different view of it.

"Don't you worry, Jess," he said. "A woman as clever as that girl of yours is damn lucky to get a man at all. She's a drop too intellectual for most tastes. The fellow seems quite a decent type, even if he is only a fisherman. He'll settle her down and blow the froth off her."

Mrs. Lysaght only sighed.

Contrary to expectations, Clare became an excellent housewife. She threw herself whole-heartedly into the unfamiliar work. Hands that had never laboured grew blistered and rough. With tremendous difficulty, she learnt the simplest way of doing common tasks that most of the women round her had learnt in childhood. Deliberately, she pushed to the back of her mind her capacity for dealing with abstract notions, and brought forward new faculties, born of some archaic dream or race memory, that a woman is unfulfilled unless she is a housewife. She had two children, a boy and a girl, strong creatures, remote from herself, whom she tended with a precise care, but for whom she felt no devouring love.

Labourer's wives, for the most part, age quickly. In their early thirties they slump into being untidily maternal, graceless Caryatides. Curiously enough, in spite of terrific expenditure of physical energy, Clare did not wilt so; instead, she brightened. It is a strange fact, that a thin person can on occasion give a greater impression of fleshliness than someone of more girth and weight. Clare had always been thin, and marriage made her a little fatter, but it seemed somehow to have reduced her lines to the barest minimum.

Undoubtedly, she suffered. Apart from her toil, she found that Sam's demands on her as a woman were plain and crude. He took and despised and went his way. She was no longer "one of the toffs". She was Maggie, Mabel, and Ethel in a convenient form. He ceased to think about her very much. There was no friction. It was as though wine had been drunk out of a fine glass, and the glass was left standing on the table, its sharp-cut lines essentially the same, having a certain beauty of its own designed to welcome the red wine that seemed to be life. Again and again it might be filled.

Clare's features themselves suggested something crystalline.

The moulded beauty had hardened, and, as it were, set itself towards a light that struck on all its facets, setting plane against plane, so that the whole had a fine pointed significance. The difference was such as lay between the artist's model and the finished statue. The unbreathing loveliness was a new creation, sensuous in the rhythm of its curves, exciting to the flesh, turning heat into light and light into form, creating and creating on and on.

In the winter of her thirty-sixth year Clare contracted a chill which became pneumonia. In a huddled little cottage, tended only by the district nurse and an indolent village doctor, Clare lay for three days in a state of semi-consciousness. On the morning of the fourth day she died.

In a sort of stupor, Sam had listened to her delirious ravings. The children he tended as best he could, with an unskilful kindness. He got his own meals and theirs, and fumbled over the household work, which for six years had been done under his eyes, without his least comprehension.

He grieved for her in a dumb kind of way, missing her, yet putting his sorrow behind him, so that it had no power to unnerve him. Death, he knew, was the lot of every man—a mystery. In the "Victoria Arms" he drank down his pint of bitter, and held out his hands to the fire, blazing in the hearth. His old friends offered their words of condolence, and one by one went their way.

It was nearly closing time, one winter evening, two days after Clare had been buried. John Short, one of the friends of Sam's boyhood, was having the last drink with him. A stranger was leaning against the bar, chatting with Dale the publican. There was no one else there.

"There was a fellow she kept calling out about, all the time," said Sam. "She went on and on about him. He was this, that, and the other. A 'paradox' she called him. That

was a new one on me. And a 'senshualist'. I know what that is, a chap that goes after women a lot. But he seemed a religious kind of fellow too. 'Wrestling with God' she kept saying over and over again. She said whole long pieces about him, just as though she was reading it out of a book."

"Did she say his name?" asked Short.

"Donne. John Donne," replied the other. "Ever heard of him?"

"Not about these parts. A boy she used to know, 'praps."

The stranger at the bar had turned round. He was a slight man, with iron-grey hair. He wore a pair of old flannel trousers and a shabby tweed coat.

"Excuse me," he said, "but are you talking about John Donne?"

"Why, yes," said Sam. "You don't happen to know him, do you?"

"I've heard of him," said the stranger, with a smile, "but I have never actually met him face to face."

Sam rose.

"Well, I'll be going now, I guess. By the way, sir, who is this man, Donne?"

"A poet," replied the stranger.

"Oh! one of them," said Sam casually, walking towards the door. "Good night." And he went out.

The stranger still remained leaning up against the bar, his hand caressing his glass, a half smile on his lips.

John Short gave him a shrewd glance, and then winked.

"I suppose you don't happen to be John Donne, yourself, by any chance?" he remarked.

The stranger looked up sharply, as though recalled from a dream.

"I?" he said. "No, I'm not John Donne. My name's

Lake. Philip Lake." He turned to the examination of his glass again, and beat a gentle tattoo with it on the wood.

". . . . I can catch her
Where none can watch her
In some close corner of my brain.
There I embrace and kiss her,
And so enjoy her, and so miss her,"

he muttered to himself.

"Time," said the landlord, wiping the last tumbler.

"Time?" said Philip Lake.

Voyage to China

J. E. Sewell

ALBERT EDWARD ran fast along the pavement, past the new traffic lights, past the Three Bears, past the firework-club shop, and down the side street with the old-fashioned lamp-posts where you could hang a rope-swing. His second wind was a long time coming, and the braces under his jersey hurt, but it didn't matter to-day, because his father was coming home from China and he was expected about dinner-time. From China! You could make the hobnails of your boots sing that as you ran. *From China, from China, from China.* George Oliver's father was a french-polisher, but he only worked in Dalston. Everybody knew about him. Albert Edward's father had been in China for two years and three months, on Government work, his mother said. He didn't quite know what that meant, and neither did she, but Dad would be able to tell him all about it, and take him out on Sunday mornings to feed the ducks in the park. And everybody would stare at him because his face would be burnt by the fierce sun that you get out East. As to Ronnie Caldwell, he wouldn't have a chance of being chief gangster any more, even if he had got two pistols. When your father comes home from China you can tell the chaps a thing or two. Albert Edward lapsed into a walk. It had been a bit funny, the way

Dad hadn't said much in his letters—hoped he was being a good boy and helping his mother and all that, but nothing about junks, or mandarins, or priceless jade figures, or money that you threaded on a string. He had had to invent a bit to tell the chaps—that yarn about the opium smugglers that his father had detected when the Shanghai police were baffled had been laying it on a bit, but it was no use being half-hearted, and Sandy Lawrence, who had doubted the story openly, wouldn't fight when it came to the point.

Anyway, there was the stamp. He had had to ask his mother for that, just to show them. His mother couldn't put her hand on a letter at first, but a few days later she brought the stamp to him and told him how she had got it specially steamed off for him. It was the usual picture of the junk—they were common enough in most collections he had found—but this wasn't like the stamps you got from a swop, or in the sixpenny assorted packets. Albert Edward felt into the depths of his sound pocket—the other wouldn't take anything smaller than a top. The stamp was quite safe, though a bit grubby by now.

He'd have more things to show them now. Bits of jade, some Chinese writings, pictures, snaps, perhaps a silk shawl or an ivory Buddha—Dad would be sure to bring things home with him. And perhaps Mum wouldn't have to go out cleaning offices any more, because, of course, he'd have plenty of money. Diving into the passage, he took the stairs two at a time, except at the place where the balusters were broken. There was a man's voice in the kitchen. It was all right, he had come, and there was a roast joint for dinner, and peas—the tinned ones, not the dried ones which hadn't got any taste. He burst into the little room, and found his father waiting, grinning happily with his arms outstretched. Silly to have to kiss a man, just because you were glad to see him

again—of course, Dad hadn't realized he was nearly ten now, and anyhow it didn't matter really.

" 'Ere, mate, 'ow did 'e get this size? " said his father holding him by the shoulder at arm's length; and then, after a pause, " Cor, you'll soon be taller than your Dad."

It was a bit disappointing, this. Had he grown? Albert Edward supposed he had, but so had everybody else he knew, Still, Dad wouldn't have remembered hearing that he was centre-forward of the junior school team that played in the park most Saturdays, or that Beaky, his teacher, had said he'd have a good chance for the scholarship next year if he worked. These things had to be told, and Albert Edward told them while his mother busied herself with dishing up the meal, and his father replied with suitable approving noises.

During dinner Albert Edward watched his father closely. Evidently the Chinese sun was not so strong as he had imagined. Somehow his father looked older, more lined about the eyes, but he was, if anything, paler than usual. He put in one or two questions about China, but his father was eating steadily, and answered in monosyllables. Nothing to tell the chaps about yet, really, except that the tropics seemed to have made him shrink, so that his clothes—the same old blue serge that Albert Edward remembered—hung rather loosely on him. Vaguely he had expected to see him in immaculate white ducks and a pith helmet, such as were worn by most heroes of the Eastern adventure stories he had managed to borrow during the past few months. Still, those clothes wouldn't be suitable for Leytonstone, and they were probably sold, or packed away. Albert Edward swallowed his dinner and listened impatiently while his mother retailed the gossip of the street and relations. There wasn't much time to talk about important things, and when Dad had finished his meal, and emptied the last inch from the beer-bottle, and leaned

back with a satisfied grunt, the school-bell had finished ringing, and he had to hurry.

. . . . .

It wasn't working out right, somehow. Turning over in his mind the events of the past fortnight as he lay in bed, Albert Edward admitted it. Ronnie Caldwell with his two pistols was still chief gangster, and looked like remaining chief gangster. "Blast him, blast him, blast him!" he muttered, jabbing viciously at the pillow with each explosion. His father's only a rotten copper, fat and pink and horrible, and mine's been all over the world, or anyhow to China for two years, and had Chinese servants slipping about and bowing to him and smiling inscrutably all the time. Only, why wouldn't Dad talk about it more? It had been a disappointment to find that he had not brought home any curios or souvenirs. When asked about them, he had just grunted and said he was bloody lucky to bring himself home, never mind the curios. Whereupon Albert Edward's mind had turned to thoughts of shipwreck, and he asked about the monsoon, finally eliciting that his father had indeed been shipwrecked, and lost all his belongings. So Mother still had to go out to work, while Dad hung around the west-end hotels trying for a job as casual waiter—he had been a waiter for years before this Government work turned up, but his old place had been filled long ago.

The shipwreck had made a very good story up to a point, and for a day or two Albert Edward had basked in the reflected glory. But there weren't enough details, that was the trouble. The ship had struck a rock and sunk in a few minutes. Albert Edward asked what had happened to the wireless, and why the ship had lost her course, but his father had told him to hold his jaw. Of course, it was fine to have Dad back again, and he wasn't really unkind—look at the

boat he was making for him and the way he took him out for walks on Sundays, and even treated him to the pictures one night when he got a treble home at racing. Only when you mentioned China and tried to find out anything exciting he grunted and then got mad. The chaps weren't so keen on this China stuff he'd had to make up, either—they'd read it all themselves, he supposed, out of the same threepennies as he'd drawn on himself. There was one hope, reflected Albert Edward. If he could earn a shilling minding cars round the football ground on Saturday, he could go and buy a little brass charm he had seen in a second-hand shop, and tell the chaps it had been hung round his father's neck by a grateful bandit whose life Dad had saved. That would be good. And Albert Edward went to sleep.

The charm was duly bought, and reposed in his sound pocket. The same evening his father came home rather late, and a bit fuddled in his speech. Dad never got really drunk, only rather talkative and dreamy-eyed. Perhaps he would tell him all about China to-night. Albert Edward clambered on the arm of his father's chair and began.

"What sort of work did you do out in China, Dad?"

"Come along off to bed now," said his mother sternly, but Dad said no, let the kid stay, and Dad's word when he was like that was law. The man pondered the question for a while, and then said, with a tired smile, "All sorts, son. I 'ad a lot to do with mailbags."

"Were you protecting the mails from bandits, Dad?"

"That sort of thing," he said.

The boy's eyes grew wider and he snuggled closer. "Tell me about your adventures," he said.

At last the man's imagination had kindled. The kid wanted adventures, did he? He should have them.

"Well," he said hesitatingly, "there was that time the mails

were attacked when I was in charge. There was thousands of them—thousands . . ."

The tired voice droned on, and the boy listened. In ten minutes Albert Edward knew that his father was lying.

Blackamoors. Bows and arrows. To him, Albert Edward, who had read everything he could lay hands on about China, who had pictured to himself the murderous battle of Chapei, who knew all about Manchuria, and soya beans, and the Chinese bolsheviks and Chiang Kai Shek. It was pitiful, and Albert Edward, willing to torture himself, once the sickening truth had dawned on him, egged his father on, suggesting new lies to him. Every one of them was accepted, developed, clumsily embroidered into the most fantastic yarn, while the boy listened and plied more leading questions, half in hope that the man would be made aware of the trap and escape by laughing and saying that he'd only been yarning for fun, half in bitter contempt. Now, as he peeled off his jersey and unlaced his boots he felt numb and desperately miserable. There hadn't been a shipwreck. His father hadn't been to China at all. It served him right for telling the chaps a lot of lies about it before. As he threw his trousers across a chair, the little brass amulet dropped from the pocket. What use was it now? He couldn't keep it up any longer. He'd just have to stay quiet and let everybody forget about it—if they would.

Albert Edward grimly nursed his secret through Sunday. With that terrible politeness that small boys can practise with grown-ups he had gone for the usual walk in the park, and fed the ducks in the lake from the weekly bag of stale crusts without once letting the stranger who walked with him know that the old confidence had gone. And all the while the hideous problem remained. What could he tell the chaps now? There was another problem, but Albert Edward pre-

ferred not to think about it. It couldn't be that, it couldn't be, it was silly to think it. Very likely Dad had been to China after all, but had lost his memory. People did lose their memories. The brass charm was back in his pocket. Of course Dad had lost his memory, that was it. And that was a ripping tale about the old bandit. Dad had seen the landslide coming, had broken away from his guards, hurled himself on the brigand, and flung him into a cave as the rocks thundered by, killing two pack-mules. That was it. You could easily lose your memory doing a thing like that. Albert Edward had almost convinced himself by the time he fell asleep.

He was late for school next day. He had dawdled down the street with the lamp-posts, thinking out new details, and unconsciously postponing the moment when he would produce the charm and tell the story. Further absent-mindedness in the arithmetic lesson led to a difference of opinion between himself and Beaky which resulted in his having to stop in during playtime—a sentence which he received with overt resentment but with inward thankfulness. At twelve o'clock he wanted to run out with the others, but he had to put away the rulers. When he came out into the playground he saw Ronnie Caldwell and the others in a corner under the shed, talking. He clutched the charm in a hand that was stickier than usual and walked towards them.

Ronnie was excited. You could tell that by the way he was dribbling. He saw Albert Edward coming, and said something, and everybody turned and looked. There was something in that look which made him clutch the little brass amulet tighter.

" 'Ow's China, Bert? " There was a silkiness in Ronnie's voice, and a titter when he had spoken.

" Wotcher mean, 'ow's China? "

"Why, where your father says 'e's been."

"Wotcher mean, says 'e's been?"

"'E ain't been to no China. 'E's been in quod, that's where 'e's been. My Dad says so. 'E knows."

Christ, it was true then.

"You're a liar," said Albert Edward coldly.

"Who says I'm a liar?"

He'd have to fight him, and Ronnie was bigger. Still, you couldn't let a dirty copper's son talk like that.

"I says so, and 'ere's your cowardy for a fight." Albert Edward lunged forward and his fist smote Ronnie in the approved place, the hollow under the collar-bone.

There were the usual formalities to be observed. Ronnie returned the cowardy, rather harder. Then they bragged at one another. Albert Edward said, without much belief, that he could lick three Ronnies with his eyes shut. Ronnie said that Albert Edward could not knock the skin off a rice-pudding, and cast a reflection on the circumstances of his birth. The ring of excited small boys formed, dispersed suddenly with an elaborate air of unconcern when Beaky appeared carrying his cycle down the steps, and reformed immediately when the tall figure had passed out of the playground and ridden away. And all the time Albert Edward knew that he would be beaten, that he was a liar, and that his father was really a jail-bird—perhaps had been marched through the streets swearing and struggling with a copper on each arm, like the woman in Mardale Street last Saturday night.

More cowardies were exchanged, and the fight began. They sparred for a while, each mustering his courage for what was going to be a hit-and-hurt affair, with no nonsense about rules. Albert Edward landed a beauty in Ronnie's eye, and then had to look to himself. Tasting salt, he realized that his lip

was cut and bleeding. His skinny arms waved wildly, and he got in another one in Ronnie's wind, following it up with a clout in the ear which made the bigger boy's head sing. The circle of sensationalists swayed and slithered about the playground as the battle shifted, and howled its encouragement to both contestants impartially. Ronnie's blood was up by now, and every minute made the result more certain to Albert Edward's clouded consciousness. He jabbed feebly at Ronnie's wind again, and received a blow on the nose which brought more blood, and the first tears. Suddenly the week-end's desperation and the jealous hate which had lain dormant for months welled up in him. He no longer feared shame or defeat. What if his father had been to quod? What if he did get a licking? He'd show 'em, he'd show 'em, the swine. He flung himself again on his rival, punching, clawing, kicking, raving, and Ronnie gave ground, surprised. As he did so, he slipped, and the next moment Albert Edward was on top of him, smashing his fists down one after another on the upturned face which seemed to be still sneering at him from the asphalt. The crowd had grown strangely silent, and presently three rather frightened boys grabbed Albert Edward and lugged him off. He fought like a cat to get back at his enemy, but Ronnie lay there whimpering. Slowly his sobs of rage died away while they held him. Ronnie picked himself up painfully and limped off with a couple of loyal adherents, and Albert Edward realized that nobody would ever dare to say that his father had been in prison again.

The new Chief Gangster trudged wearily along the street with the lamp-posts, hopelessly late for dinner. It didn't matter, anyhow. Nothing mattered much, except that he wanted his father to know what had happened. Then there'd be no more lies. Whatever he'd done, he'd paid for it. Perhaps he'd tell Albert Edward all about it—now. Maybe he'd

never done anything wrong at all. You couldn't say that Dad was wicked. Perhaps Ronnie's father—the fat pig—had owed him a grudge, and framed him like the detective did in the last film he had seen. Anyway, he and Dad could stand together now, if only they could talk to each other about things. Albert Edward's lip was swollen and stiff, and his knuckles were sore and raw. He climbed the stairs slowly and pushed open the kitchen door.

" Where's Dad? " he said.

His mother was busy at the sink. The breakfast things were still unwashed. She turned towards him, and Albert Edward saw that she had been crying. " He's gone away again," she said.

" Where's he gone, Mum? " Just as if he did not know.

The woman had turned away again, mechanically wiping the plates and putting them on the rack. " Don't bother me, there's a good boy," she said. " He's gone to—to Australia."

Stonily Albert Edward stared at the weary shoulders.

" Never mind, Mum," he said. " What's for dinner? "

Fugue for Harmonica

Allan Seager

EVERY afternoon they came up to the village green to wait, the unemployed, a few men sagging limply against the wall of a barn, with large soft hands, caps on their heads, and their necks swathed in scarves knotted and held sometimes with brummagem pins. They spoke little, watching the vapours lift or sink on the Downs, and hearing, before the cottage across the road, an old man's parrot squawking in the sun, a grey bird with a red crest. Or, to escape the sudden rains, they sat on the bench beneath the big elm on the green, watching for the newsboys to bring the *Mail,* which would tell them if their horse had won the 4.30 at Newmarket and their shilling bets turned into five; or they waited until the pub, the Greyhound, should open at six.

From the green they could just see the large botany cross of limestone in the churchyard, grey against the yews, a memorial with a graven base, bearing the legend, "For God, King, and Country." It was erected by small subscriptions in the village to commemorate the bravery, and the deaths, of their friends with whom they had gone out to war. Few of the unemployed ever looked at it, because there was always the mist to watch above the distant summit of the Downs and the parrot's curses to listen to.

Jack Haines was unemployed, living on twenty-eight shillings a week dole, and supporting his wife and his son, Cyril. He never went to the green to wait out the day, but in fine weather dug in a small garden patch or if it rained, stayed in his cottage teaching his five-year-old Cyril how to play the mouth-organ.

Out of such a dole you would not expect much of a house. There are two willows in front, a flagged walk, and the garden beside it. The cottage itself has a thatched roof, and in summer there is wistaria climbing up the side. There are also rats in the thatch that will face a terrier down, and in one room, the bricks of the floor are laid on the earth which spurts up mud in wet weather. The pump is outside, and there is a fireplace in one room only. On the mantel are cigarette cards with pictures of fish, flowers, and racehorses on them. "I was on him when he won the Autumn Cup at Newbury," Jack says, pointing to Loosestrife, a handsome bay horse. "Won a fiver. Coo, I didn't half have a night out."

Tea at the Haines's is bread, bacon dripping, and a poached egg, but if you are a guest Jack's wife will buy three of the baker's best little cakes—"Get down, Cyril, there's none for you. Shame on you"—with icing coloured violet, red, and a brilliant malachite. After tea, Jack offers a twopenny packet of Woodbines to smoke.

When Cyril has played the newest piece he has learned on the mouth-organ, Jack will tell, while his wife smiles a set and patient smile, of the high point in his life. This is not the three years he was a company runner in France, and often carried sacks of Mills bombs in the open when the support trenches were blown, but the halcyon evening that he won the South Berks shove-halfpenny championship. "On the Bell board at Wantage 'twas. Landlord had it polished till it shone like glass."

The recital takes an hour, with gestures, while Cyril squeaks

on the mouth-organ, and as a climax, Jack brings out from under the bed a huge photograph of himself, looking very sheepish, with a huge cup. "We had to sell it. Only fetched seven and six. Man at the jeweller's said it was lead."

It had been very bad with Jack before Cyril was born and while he was a baby too young to talk. There had been no work much since the War, and until Cyril began to ask questions and to run about Jack had gone every day to the village green with the rest of the workless. They had not talked against the Government nor about the War nor their officers. They simply had not talked, but leaned and sat in apathy, waiting for the day to go over their heads, sunshine or mist.

But when Cyril began to grow a little bit Jack could see that he was very bright and quick. If he saw the baker with the back of his wagon full of fresh loaves, he wanted to see how bread was made, and often on rainy days they watched the baker, with flour in his hair and eyebrows, moulding the dough and putting it in pans for the ovens. Or when they passed a farmer working in a garden, Cyril had to know why he dug, what he planted, and how it grew.

Jack started his own garden at that time, and Cyril helped him. And once a gentleman gave Jack three huge trees to cut down on his estate, and told him he could have the wood to sell in return for the cutting down. Jack borrowed a long, two-handed saw, and Cyril was just large enough to guide one handle and keep it from wiggling. At night Cyril walked into the cottage, struck his cap on his thigh to shake out the sawdust and shouted, "What's for tea?" in the same manner as his father.

Every evening at six Jack and Cyril came along by the row of pollards to the pub. Jack is very tall and Cyril came up to the middle of his thigh. But Jack never walked slowly so the boy could keep up, and Cyril never hung on to his father's coat.

He trotted breathlessly beside, gasping, "Yes, Dad," to Jack's remarks.

When they got to the doorway of the Greyhound, George, the landlord, standing with his hand on the lintel waiting for custom, would say, "Hello, artful," to Jack, and always, "Yer sprouting up like a weed," to Cyril. Jack and Cyril answered, "Evening, George," together. Then the three would go in, and the landlord would draw a pint of ale for Jack and give Cyril a chocolate biscuit.

As champion of the district, Jack always took the shove-halfpenny board into the sitting-room, a small chamber with piano and aspidistra, and on the wall a picture of the landlord's son in uniform at Poona. The bar-room is too small to play in, because the bar itself and the four barrels behind it, two of ale and two of beer, the domino table and the space before the dart board take up the room. The sitting-room is usually reserved for occasional transient gentry and the wives of the men in the bar, who sit in chairs around the walls, gossiping and drinking stout in small bottles, and when they laugh they hold their hands genteelly up before their mouths.

If no one would play Jack at shovers, he would take on Cyril, whose chin just reached over the table top. There were no concessions. Jack was quite as polite when Cyril made a good shot, and as scornful of a bad as he was with a man. When Jack got another partner, Cyril sat in an armchair gravely watching the game.

He was a fat little boy with cheeks the colour of raw liver, and he kept his cap on indoors like his father. He would comment, "Well done, Dad," or "Bad luck, Dobbin," impartially. When he thought Jack was not looking he climbed down from the chair and nipped a drink out of his father's pint. If Jack caught him, he would shout, "Stay outa me beer, me son, or I'll smack your head."

Often Jack would take Cyril on the bike to the more distant pubs, as far as the Fox at Steventon or the Noah's Ark, and Cyril would sit on the bar singing while Jack played the mouth-organ, with the farmers and working men joining in the choruses. Occasionally Cyril got drunk from too many nips into his father's pint, and the women of the neighbourhood often said that they were going in a body to Mrs. Haines to speak sharply to her about her dear little boy drinking in public-houses.

They should have spoken, even though Jack would have cursed them out of the place for meddling, for one day Jack noticed that Cyril looked too fat. It was three days later that he saw it was not fat round the boy's chin but a swelling. The backs of his hands were puffed. He put the child to bed, where he sang songs and jumped about for a week. He did not feel any sickness, but the swelling grew until his legs were as big around as a quart pot. At last, with the rustic's fear of all officials, Jack called the charity nurse, who packed Cyril off to hospital in Wantage, and when Jack came to see his son the first time, the matron, an old woman in a hooded cap, told him it was Cyril's kidneys, and that it was very serious.

When Jack told his wife, she suggested timidly, "Perhaps you shouldn't have fed him beer."

A bewildered man, seeing his little mainstay broken, and knowing no way to answer but in anger, he said, "Don't speak to me of that. He shall have beer if he wants it. Gallons of it."

Every day for weeks that spring Jack rode his bike the five miles to Wantage, where King Alfred was born, and stopped at the confectioner's in the market place by Alfred's statue to buy chocolate biscuits to take his son, as if he would wheedle him back to life with songs and little gifts.

And every night he was in the bar at the Greyhound

drinking old beer, black and musty, because it was strong and he could sleep if he drank enough.

One day the matron met him at the door of the ward, and whispered, "He's very bad. He won't last the day out. I'm sorry, Mr. Haines. He was a dear little boy," And, Jack, turning his cap round in his hands, could only answer, "Yes, madam."

He entered the ward softly, a long room full of bedridden old women with iron-grey braids, who began to nod and whisper when they saw him. In the corner was Cyril in a crib. When he heard his father's step, he rolled back his head so he could see under his swollen eyelids. "Hello, Dad," he said weakly.

Jack talked to him very cheerfully and rapidly a long time telling over all the things they would do together as soon as he was well again. A terrier, certainly, and perhaps a little bike of his own, and Newbury for the races. As if he were begging the child a favour, Jack spoke, and then pulled out the mouth-organ and wiped it on his trouser leg. "What'll it be, me son?"

"The Old Rustic Bridge by the Mill," whispered Cyril.

Jack played it, making one hand flutter at the end of the mouth-organ to give expression, and some of the old women sang in cracked voices.

He asked Cyril again, and one of the women said, with false encouragement, "Play 'Gandhi' so Cyril can sing it."

Jack played the tune, and Cyril's lips moved with the words:

> "Gandhi, Gandhi, they're coming after you.
> When they catch you, they'll give you a month or two.
> They'll bind you up with wire
> And tickle your Black Maria,
> And you'll look sweet upon the seat
> Of a bicycle built for two."

"Now what, Cyril?" Jack said.

But Cyril had closed his eyes and turned his head away.

Jack said, " Tell me a song to play fer ye, son."

Cyril did not answer.

" Tell me a song, son," Jack said again, and the tears ran down his cheeks.

" Tell me a song, Cyril, tell me a song."

The old women had begun to cry noisily.

" A song, son."

The day after the funeral, the little group of idle men on the green saw Jack coming towards them along the road, head down, walking hard. As he passed, one called, " Where be going, then, Jack? "

Jack stopped short, and looked up startled, " Why—no place, Tom. There be no place I'm going." And he looked at the barn, plastered with advertising posters, and the line of men sagged against it in the sun, and he turned slowly with resignation and leaned against the barn.

" Too bad about the little chap," one said.

Jack answered, " Aye."

And, after an hour or two of staring at the grass, with the cackling of the grey, caged parrot in his ears, Jack took from his pocket the mouth-organ and threw it into the ditch.

Mr. Binney's Afternoon

Pearl S. Buck

It was next to the last day of Mr. Binney's visit to Shanghai and he had left the most important thing until this afternoon to buy. This was a new cookstove. The cookstove he and Mary had brought to China with them twenty years before, and in which Mary had baked bread and pie and cake and sugar cookies for all the years in which they had lived in the dusty little Chinese town just south of the Great Wall, had suddenly refused to bake any longer and had collapsed. He should not perhaps have left so important a thing until nearly the last day, but he and Mary had decided they must not spend more than ten dollars on the stove, and when Mr. Binney had asked timorously at a large English shop about cookstoves the answer haughtily given had been of such overwhelming size that he could only leave in complete silence after murmuring, " Thank you, sir," to the tall, thin floor-walker dressed meticulously in formal morning clothes.

Mr. Binney had gone back to the Missionary Home where he was stopping, since he was a missionary, and there in his dingy, small room he had made the subject a matter of prayers. The result was that the very first thing he saw this morning was a second-hand shop filled with every sort of goods, and in the midst of much else was a cookstove, not too badly worn. He

hastened in, and after a little polite argument with the apathetic Chinese proprietor, he bought the stove for ten dollars. He had known he would, but the sense of exhilaration he always felt after answered prayer sent him happily down the street. One never could be sure if what one asked was in accord with God's will. When, as in this case, it proved to be so, it was very pleasant. He arranged with a riksha man to deliver the stove and then turned delightedly to thinking how pleased Mary would be.

For the cookstove was something he had planned especially for his wife, Mary, his dear Mary, as a sort of present for their twentieth anniversary. This day fortnight he would be home with her again in their little four-roomed Chinese house under the Wall, and she would be unpacking the box he had brought —first the cookstove, with which she would be so pleased, then a few spices, some tracts and a little hand-printing press to print more, some cotton stockings for her and warm underwear for them both and the lengths of strong, plain woollen stuff she would make into a suit for him and a dress for herself. It was not pretty material. Even as he bought it at a Chinese cloth shop he realized it would not be pretty; plain, dark grey cloth it was, but strong and cheap, and so he took it. They had so little money that one must think of strength and cheapness first.

Left to himself he might never have thought of anything else, except that he had learned by now that Mary loved pretty things. She was, for instance, always coaxing along the little stunted flowers in pots and boxes. He remembered once her joy over a bit of red geranium someone passing through had brought her from Peking. But it had died. The bitter, sandy winds out of the desert had killed it, as they killed everything. Those same winds had turned Mary's rosy face pale and lined, and her curly, dark hair grey and dry. Sometimes she looked

almost as dust-coloured as the Chinese women. His heart ached suddenly as he thought of her. She had been very pink and white as a girl, he remembered.

For now he thought of this especially. He had been wandering as his feet led him among the streets, and suddenly he came upon a beautiful, gay street. " It is so pretty, Mary would like it," he thought to himself, looking about him. It was a street of hospitable houses whose doors were open, and from one door and then another he saw ladies come out, prettily dressed, and step into carriages which seemed waiting for them, and then drive smartly off, their Chinese coachmen brilliant in uniforms of red and blue, and wearing tasselled hats. He stopped and stared as one of the carriages passed him. Two ladies in it threw him the gayest of smiles. He smiled back, surprised, and tipped his hat. It was very friendly of them, he thought. Perhaps they took him for someone else. But when he looked and saw another carriage pass and caught another smile as brilliant he said to himself, " It is only that they are charming and kindly ladies," and he was grateful to them, for no one else in the city had smiled at him.

Somehow when they had passed him and he had trudged away the other streets seemed less cheerful than they had been. In fact, he thought, that one street was the only really cheerful one he had seen. He began to walk slowly to the Missionary Home. When he opened the door, the place seemed suddenly unutterably dreary. Yet it was quite as it had been when he left it after his tiffin. The unframed texts in the hall, the strips of matting upon the worn floors, the unpainted wicker furniture, were all as they had been. He went slowly upstairs, stepping aside once to allow Mrs. Browntree, the housekeeper, to pass by. He looked at her as she passed. She was not changed, he knew. He had sat next to her at meals for nearly a week, and he knew very well by now her mouse brown hair and her faded

hazel eyes and her protruding front teeth which were stopped with silver fillings.

Seeing him she paused and said in her usual worried manner, "Oh, Brother Binney, *will* you take prayers to-morrow morning? Everybody seems so busy——"

Quite to his own surprise Mr. Binney heard himself saying, "I'm sorry, Mrs. Browntree, I am leaving early."

This, he realized when she sighed and went on, was practically a lie. His boat did not leave until noon. He went upstairs very gravely indeed. To lead prayers he had always regarded as a duty and an opportunity. One never knew what listening soul . . . Why did he suddenly dislike Mrs. Browntree so very much that he had lied to her? She was a worthy woman, widow to a fellow missionary whom he had thoroughly respected. He should think of this instead of remembering that her black dress hung on her in slack, rusty folds, and that there were spots on its front, and that her front teeth were stopped with silver fillings.

He did not know what was the matter with him. He entered his room. He was, he thought, tired. He lay down upon the narrow iron bed and drew a cotton blanket over his knees. He would rest a little while and then spend a time in prayer, asking God to forgive him and keep him steadfast. But instead he let the moments pass and he remembered again and again the beautiful ladies. They were, he thought, like angels. Their dresses were bright. He could not remember the colours, but they had all been so bright, such happy colours. And their faces were rosy, and their smiles so free and kind. He began to think suddenly of Mary's smile. It was kind, too, very kind, but not radiant. No one could call Mary radiant, although he now remembered, she had in her youth been merry at times, too. But this had passed. Hers had, he now perceived for the first time, been rather too hard a life for merriment, although

he felt he had done the best he could. And, of course, when he had felt his 'call', after he was graduated from the seminary in the little Ohio town where he had until then lived, Mary had been perfectly willing to come to the foreign field with him. Certainly he had not compelled her, although if she had not been willing, as he told her, he would have felt he must proceed without her, since it did not occur to him to go against his 'call'.

But he was sincerely glad Mary had felt as earnestly as he did about the Work. In the twenty years they had lived together she had been a comfort to him, although she had borne him no children. This in itself was of not such great importance, since he was aware that children would have brought problems. There was, for instance, no doctor nearer than three days away by camel. The chief inconvenience he had felt, in fact, in regard to her childlessness, was when sceptical heathen had asked too cleverly, "And if this foreign God of yours is all you say, why do you not ask him for a son, seeing you have nothing?"

To this one could hardly answer that such a prayer had been made. Indeed he knew when Mary had at times abstained from food and had stayed in her bedroom, that she made this prayer with fasting and weeping, for once he had stood outside her door and before he could enter he had heard her voice cry out in an agony he had not heard before, nor dreamed possible in her, "Oh, God, if you would just give me a little baby, dear God, just one!—I am sure I could be happier—and I would be a better woman—I promise, I promise!"

He had not gone in, after all. He crept away, astonished and miserable. He had not known her unhappy; indeed, she was even-tempered and cheerful by nature. And how could she be better? But when she came down to supper, rather pale, he said nothing, since they had never been emotional with each other. . . . Now, remembering the cry, he felt a slight sense of

hostility against God, who had not answered. Every dusty, slatternly Chinese woman in the town had many babies and only his Mary had none.

He longed passionately for the first time to make it up to her. Ah, how good she had been all these years! She had kept his home as comfortable and as clean as any home in Ohio, and somehow she managed to make the things he liked to eat, cinnamon rolls and sugar cookies and pies. . . .

But now, he decided, her life had been too dull. A woman needed romance. He thought again, very gravely, of the beautiful ladies he had seen, and of their lovely bright smiles. They had, doubtless, romantic lives of ease and pleasure. Mary's life had, of course, been very different. In the Chinese town they had lived quite as much without romance as they might have lived in a little Ohio town. They had soon grown accustomed to seeing yellow faces instead of white, and camels and donkey caravans and sedan chairs became as everyday to them as horses and buggies once had been. He preached daily in the little whitewashed chapel, and taught the scanty, curious listeners a hymn tune or two, bearing patiently their loud laughter at the strange foreign music. And since he was not very good at carrying tunes, Mary played the little folding organ, and after the service went to see mothers and told them what to do for their sick babies and grieved when they did nothing, and wept more than the mothers did when the babies died.

Certainly neither of them dreamed of romance, not even when Mr. Binney was nearly captured by bandits and only escaped by pretending he was insane, nor even when a mob threatened to kill them because it had not rained for nearly a year, and the town gods must be angry because of the two foreigners. In this case, Mr. Binney, after prayer and looking at the clouds, had averted death by promising the rain that fortunately fell the next day, although one could not be sure of

God's will, and they were ready to die if rain did not come, and had sat waiting hand in hand.

Now, remembering these and other things in their life, he cried out in his heart again, " She has had it too hard. I must make it up to her."

And then it occurred to him to buy her a real present, something lovely and for herself, not a common gift such as the egg-beater of which she had spoken, nor a package of safety pins, nor a box of pencils. As for the cookstove, he would not count it at all, he suddenly determined recklessly. No, he thought in excitement, the next morning before he started he would buy Mary a pretty dress, a really bright, pretty dress. He saw her clothed as the lovely ladies had been, fashionably, with a little hat the colour of the dress—perhaps pink. One of those ladies had been dressed entirely in pink. Pink was pretty on a lady.

The supper bell rang shrilly. He rose, relieved, excited. He would buy the dress. He could see Mary unfolding it, her eyes suddenly soft above the colour, as they always softened before beauty. He was not quick to see things, and sometimes the softening of her eyes made him first know there was something to be seen, or he would not have known it—a flower, perhaps, or new green leaves or something which seemed special to her. His heart melted in him, and flew to her defence. In the new dress she would look as lovely as any lady. How he loved her!

He went downstairs almost gaily and took his place beside Mrs. Browntree, and bowed his head for grace. But he could not keep still. It occurred to him now that he knew nothing of where to buy ladies' garments and he must ask where he could find the dress he wanted for Mary, one exactly like the pink one. He would ask Mrs. Browntree tentatively about ladies' dresses.

" I want to take my dear wife a present, Mrs. Browntree," he began eagerly. " Next month we will have been married twenty years. I thought of a dress——" His rather ordinary, hazel

eyes began suddenly to shine. " I know just what I want. This afternoon I saw the most beautiful ladies, Mrs. Browntree. In fact, the street I happened to be in seemed full of them. They were very beautiful, and they were evidently going for a drive, a number of them together. One of them had a very pretty pink dress. I thought of Mary——"

Mrs. Browntree, who was commonly abstracted in the service of the table, now stopped her ladling of the pale soup, and stared at him suspiciously. " What street was it? " she asked in a whisper, glancing at the other guests.

" I forget," said Mr. Binney, surprised. " Now I think of it, I believe it was Yinching Road."

Mrs. Browntree set her lips against her protruding teeth. She stared at him hard and, holding the ladle suspended, she leaned across the soup tureen to whisper to him, shocked to the soul, as he could see by her perturbed face. " That, Mr. Binney," she said, " is the street of—of—prostitutes! "

Mr. Binney stared back until Mrs. Browntree decently averted her eyes, for, after all, he was a man. But Mr. Binney answered nothing at all. He bent his head over his soup and ate it spoonful by spoonful methodically. For a moment he also was overwhelmed at what Mrs. Browntree had said. Those—those creatures of whom one had heard—against whom the Bible warned all men—he had stood gazing at them, taking pleasure in their smiles! He felt a little faintness within him. . . .

But suddenly, to his own astonishment, he recovered from this faintness. He glanced secretly at Mrs. Browntree's set lips, from which her two front teeth protruded. He disliked her suddenly and intensely. He disliked her drab hair and her faded black cotton dress and the grey pebble brooch she wore at her throat. Above all he disliked the righteousness of her whole bearing, although, of course, he knew she was a righteous woman, and this dislike drove him to a boldness he had not

known was in him. After all, it was true, in spite of everything, that the ladies—the women—had been beautiful and their smiles were kind—and he did not believe that necessarily every smile meant—meant—— Anyway, Mary should have as pretty a dress as any of them. She, as good as gold, should, at least, have as pretty a dress as—as a prostitute! He lifted his head and looked about him belligerently, searching for speech. At his movement someone asked conversationally, " Did you have a good afternoon, Brother Binney? "

" I did," he replied distinctly and slowly, staring at Mrs. Browntree, " I had a perfectly lovely afternoon! "

The Public-house

Rhys Davies

OPPOSITE his home was the great public-house, a stone building edged with bright yellow bricks. The boy liked the public-house. It was clamorous with life, its interior brilliant with coloured bottles and vivid with a harsh smell; the movement of humanity in it interested him. After the staid dull cleanliness of his home it was satisfying to be allowed entrance, particularly in the early winter evenings when the pink speckled gas lamps were lit and the floor was golden with fresh sawdust and crisp fires burned in the big grates.

He had right of entrance through friendship with the publican's sister, a gaunt spinster of forty who wore much coarse lace about her bodice, a black velvet band firmly binding a high mass of hair that was gold accompanied by a strange tint of mildew-green. Generous and lively, she spoke to him in a jokingly rancorous way as if he were a grown-up, and gave him pieces of mint-toffee, and often a penny. But sometimes she lifted him and stood him on the bar-counter, oblivious of the men in the saloon, and, clasping his bare knees with her big moist hands, she would ask him laughingly if he loved her and would he love her always, for ever and for ever. She could make him grin, and because her manner was raucous he was never offended or humiliated. Yet she

made him feel cautious too, and he experienced a vague, unformulated feeling when she gripped his knees and, lifting him down from the bar-counter, her hands lingered about him. She was a strong woman.

"I don't think the boy ought to get into the habit of going into that public-house," he heard his mother say.

"God bless my soul," replied his father, "he's too young to know even what they're for."

"He'll get so used to a bar ——" she went on.

"Well, perhaps he'll go into the business. There's money in pubs, Dorothy. And we'd have brandy and things cost price, if not for nothing."

An aloof friendship existed between the two families, though the one was chapel-going and the other, being publicans in the strict nonconformist place, was cast out in pagan darkness. The ladies gossiped when they met on the pavement and at Christmas exchanged pieces of each other's puddings, one never failing to compliment the other on being more successful than herself. The boy's father, anxious to retain the pub's orders for decoration and painting, sometimes sat on one of its stools and slandered politicians with the publican, a bald widower who looked out on life from the grave of a ruined digestion, eating nothing but frail biscuits and watered-down soups.

"Your boy'll be a preacher," said the publican, surveying the child, who was kneeling behind the bar re-arranging some rows of brown bottles.

"He doesn't look a preacher, kneeling down among those stouts," chuckled his father. "What makes you think so?"

"His mighty looks at us, as if he's taking us all in and finding us wanting."

Vaguely the boy heard and half understood. He felt doubtful. Preachers were black-clothed like beetles. And

after chapel he was always irritable and hungry and went straight to the larder where he ate up all the available dinner-leavings. He got up from his knees and stared absorbingly at the warm gold of a whisky-bottle. He liked to hold the smooth cold bottle and shake up the colour. There was the ice-like gin too, the purplish red of the port, the tawny depths of the sherry; and strange, seldom touched bottles that were startlingly green, white like curdled milk, yellow like buttercups, a red-black like beetroot, and a whitish gold like sunlight. He stared at them all in turn, lingering for quite two minutes over each. So absorbed was he that he did not see the publican's sister's approach and stand, hands on hips, gazing at him as absorbingly.

"Well, my lord, which'll you have?"

He started, pulled from his dream, and saw her large gaunt nose thrust out to him, the nostrils twitching with amusement. A sudden feeling of recoil gripped him, so that he was hard and unyielding when she swept him up into her arms, exclaiming:

"One day you shall have them all. On your wedding-day. You know what that is? Ah! Your wedding-day!"

The power of her physical warmth and dominant voice encircled him. He wriggled and was subjected. She tickled his ribs and he burst into wild laughter. He slipped to the floor and kicked out his legs. When his father, rapping his empty glass on the bar-counter, called out: "Now then, whiskers, come on, time to go home," he jumped up with great alacrity and ran headlong past the rows of stout and out into the hallway. There he joined his father, who was spitting into an enamelled pan marked 'Spit Here'. Hand in hand they crossed the road and entered the grey evening silence of home.

He liked the public-house best on Saturday evenings. Then

it was bustling and overflowing with people relaxed from the tension of the finished week and determined to enjoy themselves. It reeked of a life that seemed to sprout with raw vigour like some great healthy cabbage. The windows steamed, all the gas-lamps were ablaze, even the big unappetizing 'Commercial Room' was filled with a noisy mob of swollen-faced men. He wriggled his way among a forest of thighs, now and again darting right between a pair of men's legs, accompanied perhaps on these occasions by another boy: they played hide and seek among the crowded bodies. The publican's sister had no time for him on Saturday evenings. But sometimes she allowed him to climb on to a chair inside the bar and peer over into that narrow dark section of the pub reserved for women. It was shut-away and secretive, that section, and always shadowy, having no light of its own. These drinking women fascinated him; they appeared only on Saturday nights. They squatted with their glasses of black stout and talked in low whining voices; they seemed to hide under dark large hats and they wiped their noses on the back of their hands. There seemed something mournful about them.

Whenever there were apple-fritters Miss Sanders invited him to tea. He ate of them prodigiously, in the sitting-room behind the bar which, to his great surprise, was like anybody else's sitting-room, containing neither rows of coloured bottles nor sawdust on the floor. Sometimes, after tea, Miss Sanders would play the piano and sing in a deep voice *Oft in the Stilly Night*. She would then turn to him and say in a bantering way that she sounded like a cockerel. Her voice was a hoarse contralto. Once, when it was time for her to go to the bar, she asked him if he would like to screw on her ear-rings for her, but he was so awkward at the job that she did not repeat the invitation. She smelled of violets, and the back of her neck

was brown as an autumn leaf. But in spite of the apple-fritters he preferred being in the public-house proper to sitting there at the back with Miss Sanders.

One afternoon he was playing on the river-bank with another boy. They quarrelled, the boy gave him a push and he fell into the water. His opponent, frightened, ran off. But he had only squelched into some mud, dirtying himself up to the waist. Indignant and alarmed, he gazed in horror at his slimy legs and knickers. How was he to get himself dry and clean before going home? Some particularly unpleasant punishment would be given him if he went home like this. And quickly he thought of his friend Miss Sanders, who never criticized him and would only laugh at his state.

By roundabout back-lane ways, not daring to show himself in the main street, he reached the back of the public-house, scrambled up its wall and dropped into the yard. He crept down some steps and peered into the sitting-room window. Yes, she was lying on the sofa reading a book. He tapped nervously at the window; in his miserable wet state he dared not go to the door. When Miss Sanders had got him inside, her mouth gaped, and she screwed up her eyes with laughter.

"Can you," he stammered, "can you give me a pan for me to wash my knees? And then I'll stand in the front of the fire and get dry."

She stood in the middle of the room, her arms lifted, both her hands holding the high tower of her green-gold hair; she was looking at him meditatively now, having stopped laughing. "You come with me," she said at last. And she patted his head, took his hand and drew him upstairs. The swish of her hard shiny skirts was full of determination.

What a big bathroom they had! And it was white and splendid and not like the poked-away corner of the one in his home. Miss Sanders was turning on the taps in the

enormous bath. He did not move, waiting in cold wet discomfort; he did not think anything; he gazed inscrutably before him. Briskly, with quick firm gestures, Miss Sanders took hold of him and whipped off his jersey.

He stood very still, but once, as if trapped, he gazed round wildly at the door. Miss Sanders' well-known arms, hard and brisk with power, encircled him: they dexterously peeled off his clothes. He was clammy and shivering, and he was overcome with some strange new feeling that presently solidified into a knot of resentment in his mind. Too late! She had got him into the bath.

She rolled up her sleeves and, telling him that presently they would have some nice hot tea and pineapple together, she soaped him. There was no denying her. Busily, talking all the while with a bright hard gallop of words, she kneaded and rubbed his flesh. The resentment swelled into anger. At home he washed himself without help now. But he could not bring his tongue to protest. She had the large high power of the adult, and before this she had always behaved as a friend.

"There now, there now, all white and clean again! My word, look at the water! Eh, your mother would have carried on, I'm glad you came to me first . . . . I'll wrap this hot towel round you, and you must wear a little jacket of mine till your clothes are dry. . . . " She had lifted him out and was drying him vigorously, kneeling before him now, her breast oppressively near his face.

He did not enjoy his tea. Something had changed. He kept on gazing straight into the bunch of snapdragons on the table, eating with grave austerity and refusing a second helping of pineapple. He was glad when the publican came into the room. When his clothes were dry Miss Sanders insisted on dressing him. Once she glanced sharply into his face and

said: "You mustn't be frightened, your mother won't be angry now. We won't tell her, if you like."

And she pushed two pennies into his hand. He saw that she was in extraordinary good temper, her grey eyes, under which were mauve patches, bright-edged as diamonds. The bar was open as he made a slow, almost funereal way through it. A resolve was at the back of his mind but did not declare itself: he made his exit with only a vaguely troubled emotion.

For he never returned to the public-house. Daily it was before him, bright and tempting and full of gaiety. He scudded past its steps, kicked a ball on its pavement, played marbles in the road before it. Garlanded with light in the evenings, the piano in the 'Commercial Rooms' sometimes rollicking out its strident songs, men singing, tales told in the bar, snatches of mysterious phrases over which he used to ponder interestedly—he ignored and forsook them all. He regretted the loss. The public-house had been a whole world of marvels and attractive discoveries, and he remembered that part of it with pleasure. And then something had happened which made it disagreeable, which ought not to have entered into that particular world.

One afternoon as he strolled along the pavement, an upstairs window opened and Miss Sanders popped out her head.

"Hello, there, hello!" she called. "Why haven't you been to see me lately, you bad boy?"

Hesitating, he looked up, but did not answer. She was smiling down at him, a smile of friendly mockery. He remembered thinking that the tower of her hair was in danger of toppling over. She was leaning out in such great eagerness, her bantering smile thrown down to him invitingly. He looked at her with curiosity but had nothing to say. Again asking for an explanation, she added:

"Well, at any rate, come in now. I want to talk to you."

He did not move. Suddenly she dropped a coin to him. "There's sixpence for you!" she cried, her smile breaking into a laugh. "Now come in to see me."

Picking up the sixpence, he began slowly to walk away, without comment, even to himself. He only remembered that for a long time he had wanted a certain penknife. Miss Sanders did not call out again, and when he reached the corner he made a sudden headlong dive out of sight.

COMPETITION RESULT

We are pleased to announce the winner of the April short-story competition as

Miss J. M. COOBY

for her story

Cruel Spring.